

## **JEREMIAH 23: 9-32**

# **REMODELING MINDS, HEARTS AND LIVES WITH THE HAMMER OF GOD'S WORD**

### INTRODUCTION

*Children's sermon:*

Set up 6 chairs in a random way. Put 2 buckets with candy in each one on one end of the group of chairs. Blindfold one of the children (The child must be able to tell its left from its right hand). Prior to blindfolding the child say that if they make it all the way through the chairs to the bucket they can have the candy. They will get help from Julia and I. But we will be giving different instructions and they will have to decide which one of us to listen to. Both Julia and I say, "You can trust me. I will not lie to you. If you'll do exactly as I say you'll make it to the candy but if you don't listen to me you won't get there." Tell the other children to watch and listen carefully because one of them will have to do it as well. Julia tell true directions, I tell wrong directions

Why did (name of child that didn't get the candy) not get the candy? (Ans: I lied to him) Why did (name of child that got the candy) get the candy? (Ans: They listened to Julia and Julia was telling the truth.) If I was determined to always lie to you would you ever get the candy by listening to me? What would be the only way you could all be sure of getting the candy? (Ans: You would have to listen to Julia.) No matter how much I said to you, or how nice I seemed or how truthful I sounded, if you listened to me you would never get the candy.

Do you know that there are lots of ideas in the world we live in about what God is like and how you can know him. Some people think god is in everything and everyone and everyone and everything is a part of god and the way you know this god is by closing your eyes and being quiet and chanting phrases over and over again. Some people believe that there is no god at all and that everyone who prays and believes in god is wasting their time.

How are we going to decide who's right? How will we know that what we believe will actually lead us to God when there are so many different opinions about God? Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will one day come to an end but that God's word will never end." He also said when he was praying to His heavenly Father, "Thy Word is truth". What Jesus taught was that the only way we could ever know what God is like and how we can know him is if we learn what He says in this book. Today I'm going to explain what will happen to people if they listen to the false teaching that is in the world and what will happen if they will listen to what God says in his word. Pass out sheets.

### **JOAN MITCHELL READ SCRIPTURE**

### TRANSITION

Some of you could be really upset with me right now. If you paid attention to the point I was trying to make to the children you will know that I believe that this book is God's word and absolutely true in all that it affirms. Any claim that contradicts the teaching of the Bible is false. I want to say two things to those of you who may disagree or maybe are even offended by that claim.

First, please don't prejudge me or our church. There are many who say they believe the Bible is absolutely true but who then claim that the Bible tells them how long their hair should be, or how many children you should have or what God is planning to do in the United States in the next ten years. You cannot lump every person who says they believe the Bible is absolutely true in the same camp. It is my goal to be clear about

what the Bible is clear about but where the Bible does not speak, I will not say that it speaks. I refuse to use the Bible to give authority to my opinions when the Bible does not clearly support my opinions. Now, it is my hope and prayer that my thinking about all of life is radically influenced by biblical teaching, but not everything I think is what God thinks. One of the great traps for all who take the bible seriously is to make the bible say things it does not say in order to support our own preferences and opinions.

Second, the obvious question is upon what authority do I make such an incredible claim for the Bible? How do I know that the Bible is completely true and all competing views are false? That is a very important question, however, it is not the subject of the sermon. If you would like an article on the subject please take your welcome card (Everyone please take a welcome card and fill it out) and write "article" on the card and I'll mail you 2 articles that will begin to answer that question. If you'd like to talk about it, write, "please call me" on your card or see me after the service. When you finish filling out the cards everyone pass them to the aisle and an usher will pick them up.

We are in the second part of a five part series I've entitled: "Church Improvement: Building a Church that Delights in God and Loves People". The title of this morning's sermon is this: "Remodeling Minds, Hearts and Lives through God's Word." I am persuaded by the Bible itself and by over 20 years of talking with people about their relationship with God that where the bible is treated with respect and where it is the center of spiritual life, then people flourish in faith. God is near and working and people are confident and joy filled. But whenever the Bible is neglected either by a church or by an individual, while the forms of faith may persist, the reality of a living faith crumbles away.

This morning I want us to look at a passage in one of the Old Testament prophets that declares with great force and clarity why it is that we need to pay attention to God's word if we are to be a people who delight in God and love others. All of us believe things about God and the world we live in. The critical question, however, is, "Are my beliefs true or false? Do I correctly perceive reality or am I deceived? Am I actually heading for the bucket with the candy or am I listening to false teaching and so will end up with an empty bucket?"

Please turn in your Bibles to Jeremiah 23 which is on page 553 in the pew Bible. These are the words of God first addressed to the people of Judah in the years leading up to the destruction of their nation and enslavement by the Babylonian empire in 586 B.C. Jeremiah was a lone voice in Judah warning the people that if they did not stop disobeying God and trust in His ability to save them they would be destroyed. Here in chapter 23 he contrasts false prophets with true prophets. He shows what each is like and what will happen when each one is listened to. God declares through Jeremiah that...

#### MAIN POINT

**False teaching destroys spiritual life whereas God's word creates it.**

#### **I. False teaching causes people to reject the true God whereas God's word causes people to cling to the true God (vv. 9-15)**

Look with me at vv. 11, 13, 14a & 15. Jeremiah uses an image and a word to show how false teaching about God causes widespread rejection of the God who actually exists.

First, notice the word. In verse 11 he describes the prophets and priests as godless. Then in v. 15 he says that, "ungodliness has spread throughout the land" from the teaching of the prophets. What did the prophets spend their time talking about? God. What did the priests spend their time doing? Working in the temple, offering sacrifices, singing praise songs to God, teaching the people, in short doing God's work. Yet Jeremiah says they are godless and the source of godlessness throughout Israel. To be godless, means to be without God. Did they think they were without God? Absolutely not, if you asked them if they were serving God they

would have said yes. But, because they believed and taught things contrary to God's word, things that were not true about God, God says they are without me.

Second, notice the image that Jeremiah uses. In v. 14, they commit adultery and live a lie. The language of adultery is used all over the bible to describe what we humans do in our rejection of God. The picture here is that God took the people of Israel as his bride and has been nothing but a faithful and loving husband. But, by teaching in the name of other gods, like Baal, and worshipping other gods, they have committed adultery. Yet, they pretend to be God's friend. They act like everything is OK between them and God when in fact they are worshipping and serving and loving a different God than the one who actually exists.

I need your help to demonstrate how evil it is to think things about God that are not true. It really matters if you answer the question, "Who is God and what is he like?", correctly or not. I want you to get a partner and take 45 seconds to tell your partner what a good friend or a sibling or a parent is like. (Take turns, etc.) Did anyone describe a parent? Go through act of describing the parent as a drug dealer, etc. Inform the person I am going to spread this information all over town and in all the places their mother hangs out. Ask the person, "How would you feel about me doing that? Would it be evil for me to spread such false ideas about your mom?" The fact is I could be prosecuted for slander and libel.

If it's evil to spread false ideas about a human being, how can it not be evil to spread false ideas about God? How can it be a matter of no consequence for you and I to hold erroneous ideas about the nature and character of God? Is it not evil to say that God likes something when in fact he hates it? This is what godlessness is. It is believing and propagating false ideas about God. The only way you will ever know what God is like is if he tells you what he is like. The only religion in the world where God has showed up and explained himself is Christianity. The only way you will ever know if the God you say you believe in is the God who actually exists is if you believe what he says about himself in this book.

What is God like? What does God like? These are not questions that only pastors and theologians are to be concerned with. Every human being is going to have to one day stand before the God who actually exists and give an account for why they refused to believe in him. Read v. 12 & the end of 14. This is the destiny of all who refuse to submit their thoughts about God to this word.

*False teaching destroys spiritual life whereas God's word creates it because...*

- ◆ *False teaching causes people to reject the true God whereas God's word causes people to cling to the true God*
- ◆ *And because...*

## **II. False teaching creates apathy whereas God's word provokes people to action (vv. 16- 22)**

Read vv. 16-17. One of the chief marks of all false teaching about God is that it creates an apathy about changing the things that really need changing in our lives. It creates a false sense of security.

In Jeremiah's day, the false teachers told the people that God could never be angry with them. They were the descendents of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Had not God promised that he would bless all the descendants of Abraham? They had one of David's sons on the throne. Had not God promised to establish David's throne forever? They had the temple in Jerusalem. Had not God promised to make the temple the place where he would live and that he would listen to all the prayers offered there? So they told the people don't worry about what that prophet Jeremiah is saying. It doesn't matter that you are worshipping idols or sleeping with your neighbor's wife or cheating your customers in your business dealings or disobeying your parents. God is for us, because we're Jewish.

The insidious thing about false teaching is that there is some truth in what the false prophets were saying. However, they were presenting part of the truth as if it were the whole truth, which is therefore not the truth.

The same thing is happening in our day. I have asked hundreds of people over the last 20 years, “If you were to die today and stand before God and he were to ask you, ‘why should I let you into heaven?’ what would you say to him?” Hundreds of times I have had people tell me, “Because I’m a good person. I try to do what is right. I’ve never done anything really bad.” This is the same answer I gave when I was first asked that question. The bible is very clear this is a wrong answer. The only reason we answer that way is because we have a false view of God and a false view of ourselves. We fail to grasp that while God is loving and merciful he is also just and holy. Read vv. 19 & 20. God hates evil, all evil, even the evil I do. He doesn’t grade on a curve. He has promised that he will destroy all who do evil, no exceptions, because he is absolutely just. When he says, “the wages of sin is death”, he doesn’t mean just the big sins but all sins.

We answer in this way because we have a false view of ourselves. We think we are good or at least not as bad as a lot of other people. Few of us would really classify ourselves as wicked. Yet that is exactly what God says about all of us. Jesus was once asked, “Teacher, what is the greatest commandment?” ...etc.

False teaching minimizes God’s anger with sin and maximizes our ability to save ourselves. However, when we believe what God says in his word we know and feel how right it would be for God to condemn us and we see that in Christ God has provided a way to satisfy his justice and yet forgive sinners. He killed Jesus so he wouldn’t have to kill all those who place their faith in Jesus. When we are listening to false teaching our sin doesn’t trouble us and God’s grace towards us in Christ doesn’t amaze us.

But when we listen to God’s word we are provoked to action. Look at v. 22. When God’s word is preached and believed people turn away from their sins. People experience salvation. Salvation isn’t just going to heaven when you die. It’s becoming a new person on the inside, right now. It’s being made fit for heaven by being given a heart that loves what is in heaven, God himself. A person turns away from doing evil because doing evil is now distasteful and doing good is now delightful. This is the case because God has saved the person through their faith in Christ. There is no more apathy about sin, no more lethargy in regard to seeking God and worshipping him. When you listen to God’s word you are provoked to action.

Tell story of staff guy from Ohio who said, “I just thought I wasn’t going to get as many rewards in heaven.” Contrast with Doug Cousino’s decision to break off his relationship with Terry.

I don’t know where you are at with Christ. But, if you are apathetic about sin and have no energy to pursue Christ, then most likely you are not believing God’s word but some form of false teaching. I’ll tell you what Jeremiah told his audience, “Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes.” Abandon all your attempts to find life apart from Christ and seek Him alone as your salvation, as your treasure. Begin by seeking to listen to his word.

*False teaching destroys spiritual life whereas God’s word creates it because...*

- ◆ *False teaching causes people to reject the true God whereas God’s word causes people to cling to the true God*
- ◆ *False teaching promotes apathy whereas God’s word provokes action*

### **III. False teaching originates in human imagination whereas God’s word is given to those who spend time in His presence (vv. 18, 22-26)**

Read vv. 25-27. False teaching fits right in with a man-centered view of the world. It originates in the mind of humans and so endorses what humans love. False religion lets us feel good about ourselves because we have God but allows us to pursue what we really love, wealth and health and family and prestige and career success and leisure pursuits, etc. I can have god and everything else I want also. The delusional religious systems are myriad. They range from the eccentric, like the Hale-bopp cult that believed there was a space ship in the tail of the Hale-Bopp comet and so killed themselves to join it, to the more commonplace, like those who believe God will help those who help themselves.

The question we all must face is how will we avoid doing what comes natural? How will we make sure we are listening to God's word and not constructing a religious system that merely allows us to pursue our own agenda in a religious garb? The answer is in vv. 18 & 22. We must stand in the council of the Lord in order to listen to His word. The word council is a word that describes the circle of intimate associates that surrounds the king. It is used in Psalm 25:14, "the Lord confides in those who fear Him, he makes his covenant known to them." And in Proverbs 3:32, "...the Lord detests a perverse man but takes the upright into his confidence." So, the way that we come to know the word of God is to take the time to intentionally draw near to him with this book open and talk with him about what it says. The promise here in Jeremiah and throughout the Scripture is that when we will humbly come to God in this way, He will speak to us, He will reveal himself and his ways.

Those who come to him like Jesus did in the garden of Gethsemane when he prayed, "Not my will but Thine be done.", they are the ones who hear the word of God. These are the ones who are then able to help others to come to God.

Parents, do you want to help your child to know and love God. Then you must stand in his council and listen to his word. If you will, then you'll have something to say and a life to live that God can use to bring your child to faith. Do you want to influence that neighbor, family member, friend, co-worker? Stand in the council of God and listen to his word and you will proclaim his word and turn people back from their evil ways. I don't know anyone who has earnestly sought God in this fashion who has not influenced others to seek Christ as well. I have no doubt in my mind that everyone who does what vv. 18 & 22 say to do will also flourish in their faith and influence others. I also have no doubt that all who refuse to stand in God's council will end up with the false prophets living in the delusions of their own minds.

*False teaching destroys spiritual life whereas God's word creates it because...*

- ◆ *False teaching causes people to reject the true God whereas God's word causes people to cling to the true God*
- ◆ *False teaching promotes apathy whereas God's word provokes action*
- ◆ *False teaching originates in the human imagination whereas God's word is given to those who spend time in his presence.*
- ◆ *And because...*

#### **IV. False teaching is powerless to save whereas God's word powerfully saves God's people (vv. 28-32)**

Read vv. 28-29. First, notice the contrast between the false teaching of the false prophets. God's word is grain, the false teaching is straw. Grain will reproduce if planted and will provide food if made into flour. But the straw is good for nothing. All false teaching is useless in creating true spiritual life. False teaching only produces the façade of spirituality, not the real thing. It has no life and can give no life.

Then in v. 29 Jeremiah uses the metaphors of fire and a hammer to describe the power of God's word. Fire is used to purify metals. It drives out all that is impure. In the same way God's word acts as a purifying fire in our lives. It drives out unbelief and sin and creates faith in God's promises. I think also, the metaphor communicates the idea of God's word lighting a passion in my heart for God and his ways. The fire of the word lights a fire of devotion to God in my heart. Knowing the Bible isn't an end in itself but rather it is the instrument that brings me to God and creates that love for him in my life.

The word of God as a hammer shattering a rock speaks of the power of God's word to break hearts that are hard and cold towards God. God's word shatters a heart that has become callous to God and indifferent to sin. This word powerfully saves by burning off all other loves, shattering our rock-like stubbornness and giving life where only deadness existed.

Tell story of Boris Kornfield.

## APPLICATION

We need to figure out ways to get God's word into our lives in greater ways.

- ◆ Discuss sermon for 15 minutes on Sunday afternoon
- ◆ Join a Discovery Group
- ◆ Read through the Bible in a year
- ◆ Ask an older Christian to meet with you to help teach you
- ◆ Listen to sermon tapes



**FALSE    PROPHET    TRUTH    BELIEVE    JEREMIAH    FALSE    PROPHET    TRUTH    BELIEVE    JEREMIAH**

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