



Sermon – February 24, 2019
Wes Wilkinson

Verses Covered

Jeremiah 35

Jeremiah 7:21 – 23

Amen. Jesus reigns today, does He not? Amen? Amen. It's a sweet time of worship. It is such a joy to get to fill in for Chris this morning. If you could be praying for Pastor Chris, he is preaching at a conference this morning, a church conference, he's preaching three times this morning and one time this evening. So he will be back with us after that. But be in prayer for him this morning.

Now as we go to scripture today, there are some passages when you come to in the Bible that are deeply complex and once you work through what's there are deeply encouraging. And there are other passages in scripture that are simple but when you read through the message of the passage just pierces you to the core with conviction. The passage we're going to look at today is one of those. So if you've got your Bibles, go with me to Jeremiah 35. Jeremiah 35. As you're turning there, it's an interesting little passage. It's right in the middle of the book. It does not fall chronologically with what precedes it or follows it. But it's an interesting story in the life of Jeremiah. And an example that God has him use to call the people of Israel to repentance and obedience. So if you're there, Jeremiah 35, we'll pick up in the first verse. And here's what it says.

¹The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, saying, ²“Go to the house of the Rechabites and speak to them, and bring them into the house of the Lord, into one of the chambers, and give them wine to drink.” ³Then I took Jaazaniah the son of Jeremiah, the son of Habazziniah, the whole house of the sons of the whole house of the Rechabites, ⁴and I brought them to the house of the Lord, into the chamber of Hanan the son of Igdaliah, the man of God, which was near the chamber of the officials, which was above the chamber of Maaseiah the son of Shallum, the doorkeeper. ⁵Then I set before the men of the house of the Rechabites pitchers full of wine and cups; and I said to them, “Drink wine!”

Jeremiah sets up a picture for us of an interesting little story. He says it takes place in the days of King Jehoiakim. King Jehoiakim, as it says, is the son of Josiah. He will come to the throne. King

Josiah brings reform in Israel. He dies at the hands of battle with Egypt. His first son comes to the throne and he's disposed. And Pharaoh Necho of Egypt, he puts Jehoiakim on the throne. And it tells us about Jehoiakim in 2 Kings and it makes this statement about him in 2 Kings 23:37 that Jehoiakim did evil in the sight of the Lord according to all that his fathers had done. And then further down in chapter 24 it says that God had raised up the Chaldeans and the Arameans and the Moabites and were sending them actively against Judah to destroy Judah because of the sin that Jehoiakim was leading the people in. Now we need to understand, when it says Jehoiakim walked in the sins of his fathers, Jehoiakim's father, his father's Josiah. Josiah walks well with the God, but before Josiah, Josiah's father lives briefly and reigns and rules in wickedness, but Josiah's grandfather, Jehoiakim's great-grandfather is King Manessah. King Manessah's the longest ruler in the history of Judah. And King Manessah, it's going to say about him, that he led Judah in more wickedness than even the tribes, the peoples, who had inhabited the promised land before Israel came up out of Egypt.

Here's just a list of some things 2 Kings 21 tells us. Manessah rebuilt the high places. He erected altars for Baal. He brought back the Asherahs like King Ahab. He worshiped all the hosts of heaven and served them, demonic worship. He practiced child sacrifice. He built altars to false gods in God's temple. He practiced witchcraft, divination, mediums, and spiritists. He established temple prostitution. He put a carved image of Asherah in the temple. And it says about him that there is no king who had walked in greater wickedness. So when it says Jehoiakim walks in the wicked ways of his father, you and I need to understand the level to which, the level of murder, of oppression, of immorality, and if those things aren't an affront enough to God, to march into God's temple and erect altars to other gods. This is what Jehoiakim is leading the people in and the people are going with it. And not only that, but Jeremiah 7's already told us that the people of Israel, they're not just practicing this paganism, but they're practicing this paganism which God says, "While trusting in the temple." Which means the people did not truly worship God. Obviously, they were walking in disobedience, but they were still going to the temple and praying to Jehovah. They were still crying out for deliverance when things went bad. And they were still practicing sacrifices in the midst of over here on the side also practicing rampant immorality and sin.

And it's into this situation that God tells Jeremiah to go to this family, the Rechabites. Now we don't fully know for sure where they're from, but we seem likely from scripture that they are a descendants of Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, who comes into the nation of Israel. They're going to name in a moment one of their fore-fathers, Jonadab, who you meet in 2 Kings. And he is part of cleansing out the worshipers of Baal and the northern kingdom. But he goes to them and God's command is simple. I want you to take them, take them to a specific place in the temple, one of these side rooms, and I want you to set before them wine and tell them, command them from Me, to drink. And so he does this. This is the scene. Now pick up in verse 6. Here's what it says.

⁶But they replied to Jeremiah, "We will not drink wine, for Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, commanded us, saying, 'You shall not drink wine, you or your sons, forever. ⁷You shall not build a house, you shall not sow seed, you shall not plant a vineyard or own one; but in tents you shall dwell all the days that you may live, many days in the land in which you sojourn.' ⁸We have obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, in all that he has commanded us, not to drink wine all our days, we, our wives, our sons and our

daughters, ⁹nor to build ourselves houses to dwell in; nor to have vineyard or field or seed. ¹⁰We have only dwelt in tents, and we have obeyed and have done according to all that Jonadab our father has commanded us.

And then verse 11 they simply say, the reason we're here in Jerusalem is because Nebuchadnezzar's on the war path and we were in danger so we sought shelter here. It's an interesting little statement. They have the prophet of God with the word of God telling them, "Here's the wine. Drink it." And they look back at the prophet of God filled with the word, and they say, "No. We will not. And we will not because our forefather, Jonadab, has called all of us." Now if Jonadab is the forefather, if it's the Jonadab in scripture, he's been dead for several hundred years. But he's given his family this word that they're going to follow. Do not drink. Do not own land. Do not work the land, but you're going to dwell remotely as a nomadic tribe. Now understand this command. This is a command from a relative who's dead, who, yes, he said that they would be blessed if they did this, but dead relatives can't bless you. It's a non-moral command. There's nothing greater in the eyes of the Lord, according to the Old Testament, if they live nomadically or stay away from wine. It's a difficult command. You're talking about a day and age where you must live in a tent. You never have any land to farm. You never know where your next meal's going to come from. You don't have any stability that comes with that. And you're talking about a day and time when there was not abundant sources of clean and safe water to drink. So for many it was far safer to take the cheap house wine because it was safe. Yet they say, "We won't do it, Jeremiah. We won't do it. But because our father has called us to this and we haven't broken it and we won't now."

And here's where the passage takes a turn. Look with me at verse 12.

¹²Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, saying, ¹³"Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, 'Go and say to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, "Will you not receive instruction by listening, by heeding, by conforming, to my words?" declares the Lord. ¹⁴"The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab, which he commanded his sons not to drink wine, are observed (they are kept). So they do not drink wine to this day, but they have obeyed their father's command. But I have spoken to you again and again;

And it's an interesting little Hebrew idiom that literally is early in the morning I have gotten up and spoken to you. And the idea is that God has spoken with eagerness, with zealously, he has wasted no time and He has never stopped in His persistence in speaking.

I have spoken to you again and again, yet you have not listened to Me. ¹⁵Also, I have sent to you all My servants the prophets, sending them again and again, saying, 'Turn now repent every man from his evil way. Amend your deeds. Do not go after other gods to worship them. Then you will dwell in the land which I have given you and to your forefathers; but you have not inclined your ear to listen to Me. ¹⁶Indeed, the sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have observed the command of their father which he commanded them, but this people has not listened to Me.

And in verse 17 he says:

¹⁷Because the people have not listened, He will bring the destruction that He has promised in order to discipline them.

It's an interesting little passage because all of a sudden you think, "Wow! The audacity of these men, the Rechabites, to look at God's prophet and say, no, we won't follow that because of this command that is non-moral, that is extremely difficult socially for their lifestyle. Yet God's rebuke is not for them. God's rebuke is for the people of Israel who Jeremiah goes out and he says, here's a people. They don't know their forefather. They've never ever met Jonadab. Jonadab's promised a blessing, but he can't keep it. He's called them to something that has no actual moral, eternal standing and is extremely difficult. Yet here, over here, people of Judah, I am your God. I am the one who has delivered you. I am the one who has saved you. I am the one who speaks to you. I am the one who has made promises to you and I can back my promises up. Everything I call you to is a matter of eternal weight and morality. And I have spoken to you from the moment that you began to stray away from my path. I have never let up. I have never eased. Not only have I spoken, but I've even sent my prophets in person to speak to you on my behalf. And you have not listened once. In those six verses, there are 20, over 20 words that either reference speaking a command or listening and obeying a command. You think God's hidden the meaning of the passage? God is making it clear to people, "I am God. And if I am your God, I expect you to follow Me as God; to heed My word which I have spoken clearly but you haven't." And so He calls them to repent. This is the dominant theme. This is the message. God is God. God calls His people to follow Him. To follow Him means you and I take seriously His words, His every word. So it leads us to ask the question: today who do we, the people of God, we're not like Judah, we're not under the old covenant, we're in the new covenant. If you're in this room and you're a child of God, it's because you have placed your faith resting in Jesus Christ, resting in who He is and what He's done on the cross in His resurrection. We praise Him because He's risen and we have a relationship with God that the people of Judah could not have pre-the cross.

It leads us to ask the question, "Who do we listen to?" Who do we listen to? Do we listen to what culture says is right or to what God says is right? Do we value the traditions of our families more than the commands of God? Are we more concerned about what the financial experts say about our salary and our retirement than what God says about stewardship with His money He's given to us? Are we more concerned with what the education experts say our kids need to get to college to have this to have that? And to so busy their lives that we ignore disciplining them and teaching them to value the things of God. Do we care more about what the movie critics say is an excellent movie, but we ignore the extreme amount of immorality and profanity in the movie which saddens and crushes and grieves the heart of God? Or let's maybe put it even more close to home for us. Clearly, obviously, I absolutely love A&M. I love our traditions. I love what we have here. This is home. But do we care more about making sure when we walk into the MSC out of honor for fallen soldiers, we remove our hats? Do we care more about making sure every time we refer to that other school in Austin, we make sure we say tu, not ut than we do about taking the name of the Lord in vain every time we say "Oh my and "His name." Are we more passionate about making sure that we are good and faithful members of the 12th man? We will not sit down when our boys are on the field because we are just as much a part of the game as them. Than we are about God's command which says, do not neglect the coming together as the local body of Christ. We live in a day and age when the average faithful church member statistically comes to church less than two times a month. You would flunk out of college at that rate. But that's what passes for a faithful

church member today. You're right. We won't sit down for our boys on the field, but we sure will sit down when it comes to God's command for His body. How many times do we have to hear and be challenged that God has given us and filled us with a gift, a spiritual gift, that is intended according to scripture to build up the body of Christ. Which means that everyone in this room, if the Holy Spirit lives within you, you have a spiritual gift. You have some aspect that God has given you to build up the body here. But how many times do we hear the call, the need, for volunteers in the church, and we say, "Oh, that'd be good." And then we forget and we go about our merry way. See, we've got to ask the question today, "Who do we listen to? What do we observe?" And we may listen to and observe many things that God tells us, but we should all every one of us be able to come before the Lord with open hands and say, "Lord is there any area where I am ignoring you?" Because the people of Judah would have said, "We see the Babylonians coming. We're crying out, Jehovah! Deliver us! We're over here. We're offering the sacrifice. Yes, and you're over here bowing to the Baals. And you see no problem. Who do we listen to? What command and traditions do we observe? We will fight hard for our traditions and we will, we will fight for what the experts tell us is good and we ought to have, but unfortunately, as a whole and our church culture in America today, we will not fight hard for every last word of Christ.

It's interesting. You can turn there if you want. It's just a few pages away, but Jeremiah 7, Jeremiah 7, verse 21. Got makes this statement to Judah. He says:

²¹"Add to your burnt offerings and to your sacrifices and eat flesh.

Sure, go to church more. Have more quiet times.

²²But I did not speak to your fathers or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices.

Which is an ironic statement. Because if you go back to Exodus and you go to Leviticus and you go to Deuteronomy, there's a whole lot about sacrifices. He said, "That's not what I spoke to them about." Verse 23.

²³But this is what I commanded them, 'Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you will be My people; and you will walk in all the way which I commanded you, that it may be well with you.'

God's call in our lives as Christians is not complicated. We go back and we read all of that in Leviticus and we think, "Man this is so complicated." God says, "It's not complicated. Here's what I want you to understand. Obey Me. Follow Me." You can't obey someone you don't know. If you're in this place today, you can't obey God if you don't know God in a personal relationship. If you're in this place and your faith is anywhere else other than Jesus Christ, who He is, and His finished work of going to the cross and rising from the grave. If you are not saved by grace through faith, then that's the starting point. God's word to you today is repent and believe; be saved. And there is no better time than today to do that. For those of us who have been saved, you can't, you will not, you and I will not obey Him if we don't know what He's actually said. And here's the wonderful part about God. God has made what He said very clear. It couldn't be more clear. Because He's put it down in word.

It's interesting, a book that I've read through on just spiritual disciplines, he gives the example about the word. He mentions going on a mission trip to, the author, going on a mission trip to Africa. And he gets to this church in the middle of the jungles and the pastor gets up and preaches and, but he notices as he stays with this church that their lifestyles are just filled with sin. And then he discovers they have never, the pastor has memorized six sermons he heard as a boy. And they have no copy of God's word. So he went and found copies of God's word in their language and the change in the congregation was almost instantaneous. And they said, "We didn't know this is what God wanted, but now we know so now we must obey." We have His word. Is His word a part of your life? Do we meditate on His word as He commands? Do we abide in His word? Does His word abide in us? We will not obey Him if we do not know what He is saying. And this is wonderful because it means that this is not a matter of what I feel. It's not a matter of whether today you and I feel guilty over some sin in our lives. That's not it. It's a matter of objectively am I in sin or not. It's not a matter of whether Judah felt bad bowing down to the Baals. The matter of fact was you're bowing to Baal and not to Jehovah, not to God. We won't obey if we don't know His word. And we need to make sure we don't confuse His patience with getting a pass. The interesting thing as you study the book of Jeremiah, is the people of Judah are walking in all sorts of wickedness. And it's an interesting statement back in Jeremiah 25, Jeremiah comes and speaks to them and God's speaking through Jeremiah and he says to the people, "For 23 years I have spoken to you every day but you have ignored my voice." I remember when I first read that passage back in college, and I thought, "I'm not even 23 years old at that time." Yet God says every day for 23 years He has called them to repentance. And the implication was that at any point if they had turned back to Him and turned away from the idols, turned away from the child sacrifice, away from the immorality, and they had turned to Him and said, "God, You're right and we are here to follow You." If at any point that had happened, God would have restored them and Babylon wouldn't have come. But He said, "You've ignored me for 23 years and the point's finally come where you've hardened yourself enough it's time to bring the next level of discipline. And so Babylon's going to come."

Sometimes we can confuse, "Well God, I know this is sin, but God hadn't brought any deep consequences. So He must be OK with it." Do not confuse God's patience to call us to repentance with a pass. But understand His character. We see His character all throughout this passage. We see His holy righteousness. Clearly God has an issue with their sin. Why? Because God is God. And He is the definition of right and if it doesn't line up with Him, it's wrong. And God does not have a whole lot, God does not think highly of our traditions and what our experts say if it's not in line with Him. He doesn't really care because if it's not in line with Him, it's not there. God is righteous. He takes sin seriously and God thinks He's God and expects people to relate to Him on that basis. At the same time in this passage, you can't help, you will miss if you look over it, but God's holy love is all throughout this passage. Scripture's clear that if you are a father who loves your children, you bring discipline, or to use the word that was back earlier in our passage in verse 13, instruction. Now instruction can be training in what is good. Meaning that you haven't done anything wrong, but I'm going to train you in what's right. Instruction can also mean you have erred. And because you have erred, the Father, in love, brings the harder discipline to put you back on the path. You see God's love in this passage because this is not an instance of God just going, "I'm mad because you're not doing with I want." It's God saying, "I am God. I am life. And the sin you engage in is death. And I love you and I care for you and I am holy and I will

uphold my standard and I want you to have life. Heed My call today.” This is why when you go to the New Testament, Jesus in Matthew 23, He laments over Jerusalem. “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stone those who are sent to her? How often I wanted to gather your children together the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings and you were unwilling.” You cannot read this text and not see the heart of God’s love. God is not coming down hard on Judah because He is just cracking the whip. He is cracking the whip because He loves and cares for them. In this, this is why God demonstrates His holy patience. There are going to be times in our lives we walk into sin and God gives us a very short leash. We step off where we’re walking rightly, eyes on Christ, we all of a sudden turn to indulge in sin and God very quickly snaps the leash and we’re pierced with conviction. We’re brought low and consequences come in and we move back in repentance to the Lord. There’s other times when God is not approving of our sin, but God doesn’t pull the leash tight right away. But He persistently over and over calls through the soft and but persistent conviction of the Holy Spirit who lives within us, “That’s sin. Turn back. Turn back. Turn back.” God wants His victory in every area of His life. I can’t tell you how patient He will or won’t be with your sin or my sin. What I do know is that His patience is not intended to be abused, but it is always for the purpose of seeing us come in repentance back to Him. Which is what the incredible part is, because God is a gracious and forgiving God. He says in Jeremiah 3, he says, this to the same people.

Return faithless Israel. I will not look upon you in anger for I am gracious. I will not be angry forever. Only acknowledge your iniquity that you have transgressed against the Lord, that you have scattered your favors to the strangers under every garden tree and you have not obeyed my voice.

He says to them, “Return. Turn back to Me.” That’s the definition of repentance. It’s I’m looking this way saying this is right, but then I turn back to the Lord. He says, “Return.” He says, “Repent.” He says, “Turn to me. Recognize you yourself have sinned.” There is no aspect of sin in our life, even if other people have sinned against us and it’s a response to that, any time you and I sin, it is on us and it is an affront to God. But God is gracious and God is forgiving. If you are in Christ, He’s already forgiven your sin. So the question is, will you and I turn, will we confess our sin to Him who is faithful and just to cleanse us and forgive us. Do not miss the call. We cannot confuse His patience with giving a pass. We need to understand His heart. He is righteous. He is loving. He is patient. He is gracious. He is forgiving. And that should drive us to repent and to hear, to hear His word today. To turn to Him and to obey. Look with me at the last part of the passage. Verse 18.

¹⁸Then Jeremiah said to the house of the Rechabites, “Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, ‘Because you have obeyed the command of Jonadab your father, and kept all his commands and done to all according to he has commanded you; ¹⁹therefore thus says the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, “Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not lack a man to stand before Me always.””

Here’s what God says. God always honors obedience. He tells this family, “You have faithfully followed the command of your forefather who many feel like the command might have been an aspect, might have been something of trying to walk well and rightly with God.” He says, “You followed his command and so here’s how I will honor you. You will never lack a man standing

before me.” And interestingly enough, when you go to Nehemiah chapter 3, a hundred and fifty years later, when the Judah has come back into the promised land, it says, it mentions a man by name, a son of Rechab who’s faithfully rebuilding the wall and obedience to God’s command. The Rechabites were still going to go through the Babylonian assault against Jerusalem. They were still going to get taken to captivity. God’s honoring of our obedience doesn’t always mean that it’s instantaneous honoring in terms of our experience. It doesn’t always mean that it exempts us from tough times. But God always honors obedience. We talk often about leaving a lasting legacy. If you and I want to leave a lasting legacy in the lives around us, our family, our friends, then here’s the key: obey God. Because God honors obedience and God is calling out today. Will you follow?

Let’s pray.

God thank You so much that Your word is clear. This passage is so simple, yet it can be a sucker punch to the very core of my spirit. God I, no doubt, there are those of us in all ways in here. There are some in this room today, God, who do not know You. They do not know You. May they understand that You take their sin seriously. So seriously that You have made a way that Jesus You have taken their sin, that You today, because You have died on their behalf and risen. You call them to salvation. May today be the day they turn to You. God for those of us who are Yours, Father, where undoubtedly there’s those who are walking well today, may they be just encouraged that You honor obedience. May all of us have open hands to say, “God where are we ignoring You?” And Father if there are any in this place today that just the Holy Spirit, You’re piercing them right now, may they understand who You are. You are righteous and You are loving. You are patient and You are gracious and forgiving. God may today if there are any of us who have turned, may today be the day where we turn, where we repent, where we turn back to You. Holy Spirit as You move, may we respond.