

CHANGE YOUR WAYS

Can you imagine being in a restaurant that is full of people enjoying their meal and as you return from the rest room you discover a fire that is smoldering and just about to really get out of hand. You immediately find a waiter and tell him and he seems unconcerned, so you talk with the cashier and she tells you that you'll have to see the manager. You start to get worried about this time and you run up to the manager and tell him that the place is on fire and that something needs to be done right away or the whole place will be engulfed in flames. The manager immediately scolds you for trying to stir up trouble and tells you to keep your voice down so that you don't disturb the customers. You can't take it anymore so you go into the dining area of the restaurant and shout "fire". The folks that are eating barely look up and mumble something about the fact that they aren't leaving until they finish their meal and have dessert. In the meantime, the fire grows bigger and you think that surely the manager will do something to save the lives of the people that are there. When you try to find him again you discover that he has done something, he called the police to arrest you for disturbing the peace. This seems ridiculous and yet we find many times that the prophets of God were facing similar situations with the people of Israel and Judah. They saw that the fire of the judgement of God was already lit and that it was just a matter of time before the nations would be destroyed if they did not change their ways. Jeremiah was one of those prophets that was ignored and even arrested for trying to warn the religious leaders, the civil leaders and the people. Jeremiah prophesied during the time right before the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. He saw the urgency for the people to do something right away and experienced the frustration of no one caring enough to repent.

JEREMIAH 26:1-3 When Josiah died in a battle with Egypt, the religious reform movement lost its momentum. Josiah did a lot of good while he was alive in helping to get rid of the places of idol worship in the nation; however, the people did not get rid of the places of idol worship in their hearts. It was a case of Josiah got religion but hardly anyone else did. The people did what they did because he was king and nobody wanted to go against what the king wanted. Apparently, not even Josiah's children were really into the reformation because when his son came to the throne the country slipped back into the false religious practices and injustice in the society.

In the political arena, the third son of Josiah (Jehoahaz) was declared to be king. No apparent reason is given why the eldest son Johanan was bypassed; however the second son Jehoiakim was bypassed because he had pro-Egyptian political leanings. Pharaoh Nechoh invited Jehoahaz to a meeting in Riblah and when Jehoahaz arrived the Egyptians captured him and declared his brother Jehoiakim to be king. Jehoahaz eventually died in Egypt and Israel had to pay tribute to Egypt. It was into this mess that God sent Jeremiah to warn the people that judgement was coming.

God sent Jeremiah to the temple to deliver his message. This was significant in that the basic problem in the society was the fact that even though the people continued to be "religious" that it was really hollow and did not result in righteousness. The people thought that just because they were Israelites, the people of God, that they could do what ever they wanted to and everything would still be OK. They believed that the temple would last forever because it was God's temple and they believe that Jerusalem would never be defeated because it was the city of God. It is ironic that they had confidence in God but they did not fear and reverence Him in such a way that it resulted in obedience. God's message through Jeremiah was a plea for the people to repent so that He would not have to bring judgement on them.

JEREMIAH 26:4-6 This part of the message that Jeremiah delivered was intended to remind

the people of what happened many years before when the center of worship was at Shiloh and because of the rebellion of the people, the city was still in ruins. The same thing could and would happen to Jerusalem and the temple there if the people persisted in their rebellion ignoring God's laws. The urgency of the message and the seriousness of the situation is seen in the idea of God rising up early to send the prophets to the people.

Jeremiah was about as popular in what he did as the situation of the fellow in the restaurant telling everyone that the place was on fire. The people did not want to hear what Jeremiah was saying and the religious leaders tried to stir up the people into taking action to kill Jeremiah. Their idea was that what Jeremiah was saying was false theology. Their theology was that God would never allow His temple or the city of Jerusalem to be destroyed and anyone who said that He would was blaspheming God. Before they could carry out their plan, some of the political leader convinced the people that Jeremiah be given a trial and he was allowed to defend himself.

JEREMIAH 26:12-13 Jeremiah's defense was simple and straightforward: "God sent me to speak against the temple and the city." Notice that Jeremiah did not back down from his message. God told him all the words that he spoke. He really had no room to back down. If part of what he said was something that he thought, then he might be able to rethink his position; however, since all he said was given to him by God he could not change it. Even in judgement we see the quality of mercy that characterizes God coming through. There was a way out for them. That way is the same way that is available for every person in the world even today and that way is the way of repentance. Repent and obey God and God will intervene in our behalf. That has been the call down through the ages from the time of Adam to the time of the prophets. It was the call of John the Baptist and it was the message that Jesus proclaimed. It is the call of every successful reform movement during the church age and it is the very thing that will keep our nation from sliding further in the abyss of sin that we seem to be going.

JEREMIAH 26:14-16 Jeremiah was not about to change his message even though he knew that he could not protect himself from harm if they chose to harm him. The only thing that he said that sounds like he was speaking in his own behalf was to point out that he was innocent of any crime.

The political leaders (the princes) and the common people had to agree with Jeremiah and they came to his defense against the religious leader. Why is it that the lay person is quicker to respond to the word of God than the professional religious worker? Even in Jesus' time, it was the religious leaders that opposed the work that He was doing and it was they that stirred up the people against Jesus.

The sad part of this story about Jeremiah was that even though the people agreed that Jeremiah had spoken to them a message from God, they apparently did nothing to change the way they lived. They heard but did not do. There is folly in hearing the truth and not acting on it. Wisdom comes hearing the truth and then changing what we do so that the truth has a chance to work in our lives.