

10. Nothing has changed

May 7, 2015

I want you all to put on a thinking cap and come up with the answer of the greatest threat to the church. Some of you might be thinking about satan and his cohorts. Or socialism or communism which persecutes churches terribly like North Korea and China. Or some of you are thinking about Islam, especially ISIS. I agree that they are all good answers, but I don't think that they are the greatest threat against the church, because whenever there are physical persecutions against Christians, the number of the people who claim to be Christians may decrease, but the depth and purity of the real Christians' faith will increase.

In my opinion, the greatest threat against the church is humanism. The idea of humanism officially started during the Renaissance. The humanism brought light to the so-called Dark Ages of the Medieval period and that encouraged people to rediscover the great literature of antiquity of Greece and Rome.

Humanism has brought a lot of good to civilization, but it comes with many subtle dangers. Celebrating human capabilities, such as learning and enlightenment, it can blind us to our need for God. Claiming that "man is the measure of all things," it praises what it views as the indomitable and unconquerable nature of the human spirit – leaving little room in the heart for God, and no place for His omniscience and power.

Surprisingly, humanism has even slipped into the church from late 80s to 90s. People tend to emphasize what they do for God instead of what God has done for them. They go to church every time the doors open. They give up things. They even try to be perfect. In short, they adopt a "works mentality" and lose sight of the Gospel. It changes the focal point of the church – from God to humans – rather than being obedient to Almighty God, pastors and the church leaders think about their congregation's acceptability of them more. Rather than pleasing the Lord with the purity and holiness in our hearts and lives, our hearts are getting filled with all the other things that have nothing to do with the glory of God by inserting humanism into Christianity.

To please themselves over God; to ignore what the Lord wants them to do; and to do whatever they want, they all have to do one thing first – discard the Word of God. Nothing has changed from the ancient to the modern day. This evening, we will find three groups of people who discarded the Word of God – king Jehoiakim, the people of Judah, and king Zedekiah. They made their choices, and they faced the consequences.

A. GOD'S WORD IGNORED

Jeremiah 34:8-11 This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, after King Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people who were at Jerusalem to proclaim liberty to them: 9 that every man should set free his male and female slave--a Hebrew man or woman--that no one should keep a Jewish brother in bondage. 10 Now when all the princes and all the people, who had entered into the covenant, heard that everyone should set free his male and female slaves, that no one should keep them in bondage anymore, they obeyed and let them go. 11 But afterward they changed their minds and made the male and female slaves return, whom they had set free, and brought them into subjection as male and female slaves.

They, the people of Judah from the kings to the mere peasants, had everything going for them. The Lord was their God and He protected them and provided what they needed for them. A glorious heritage from the Lord through Moses; a land conquered by Joshua; an enormous kingdom established by David and a splendid temple built by Solomon. All of these couldn't prevent the shameful ruin by their own idolatrous hearts.

What did their kingdom do to cause this total decay? It was not because of the foreign invasions. God promised them that He would protect them from their enemies if they only were obedient to Him. They didn't believe the Word of God and the promises of God. Instead of relying on the Lord, king Solomon married many foreign princesses to make alliance with them. In other words, he'd rather trust these idol worshiping foreign kingdoms for their national security over what God could do for them. He ignored the Lord's promises and discarded the Word.

Solomon's descendant, king Zedekiah was no different than his ancestor. He was hoping that Egypt would rescue them from Babylon's invincible army. It didn't work.

In their desperation, the people of Judah made a covenant with the Lord to free all the Jewish slaves. According to the Laws of God, they were supposed to free them after 6 years, but none of them followed the Word of God. Why did they do this now? Possibly they were trying to earn some brownie points from God? Additionally, since those Jewish people were no longer their slaves, they didn't have to provide food for them.

But when the Babylonian army went off to confront the Egyptian army, these Jewish masters all forced their slaves back as before. They didn't care about God's Word, nor did they care about their oath to the Lord.

B. THE OBEDIENT RECHABITES

Jeremiah 35:12-16 Then came the word of the Lord to Jeremiah, saying, 13 "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: 'Go and tell the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, "Will you not receive instruction to obey My words?" says the Lord. 14 "The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab, which he commanded his sons, not to drink wine, are performed; for to this day they drink none, and obey their father's commandment. But although I have spoken to you, rising early and speaking, you did not obey Me. 15 I have also sent to you all My servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them, saying, 'Turn now everyone from his evil way, amend your doings, and do not go after other gods to serve them; then you will dwell in the land which I have given you and your fathers.' But you have not inclined your ear, nor obeyed Me. 16 Surely the sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have performed the commandment of their father, which he commanded them, but this people has not obeyed Me."

This event happened 18 years earlier than what happened in chapter 34. Jeremiah was adding this into his writing to compare the Rechabites' obedience to the disobedient Jewish people.

The Rechabites were a clan of nomadic people loyal to their ancestor Jonadab who were mentioned in 2 Kings 10. They were commanded not to live in houses, not to have farms or vineyards, and not to drink wine. They were related to Moses' father-in-law, Jethro and for over 250 years had composed a small "separatist" clan in the

nation. Because of the Babylonian invasion, they had forsaken their tents and moved into Jerusalem.

The point of this message is that if a command from a mere man, Jonadab, was respected and obeyed by his family over 200 years, why did not the people of Israel and Judah obey their God's commands through prophets and the Laws? Again, they ignored God's Word and discarded it.

How often were the believers of God shamed by the discipline and devotion of unbelievers for their intense loyalty to what they believe in? I see atheists, Mormons, Jehovah's Witness people, and many Islamic people are much more fervent and much more loyal to their causes and beliefs than many Christian born-again believers. If we put out that much obedience and loyalty to the Lord and His Word, this world would be much different than now.

C. THE KING WHO BURNED GOD'S WORD

Jeremiah 36:1-3 Now it came to pass in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, that this word came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying: 2 "Take a scroll of a book and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel, against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah even to this day. 3 It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the adversities which I purpose to bring upon them, that everyone may turn from his evil way, that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin."

Jeremiah 36:20-24 And they went to the king, into the court; but they stored the scroll in the chamber of Elishama the scribe, and told all the words in the hearing of the king. 21 So the king sent Jehudi to bring the scroll, and he took it from Elishama the scribe's chamber. And Jehudi read it in the hearing of the king and in the hearing of all the princes who stood beside the king. 22 Now the king was sitting in the winter house in the ninth month, with a fire burning on the hearth before him. 23 And it happened, when Jehudi had read three or four columns, that the king cut it with the scribe's knife and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the scroll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth. 24 Yet they were not afraid, nor did they tear their garments, the king nor any of his servants who heard all these words.

Again, this event happened during the time of king Jehoiakim's reign. Yes, the Bible is not written in chronological order.

Did you notice what the Lord is saying in v3? He was providing every possible escape hatch in front of the people of Judah before they destroyed themselves. Contrary to some people's idea of an angry God, His primary desire is to forgive our sins and save us from our own self-destruction. God doesn't send anyone to hell. Besides, hell was originally made for the fallen angels like satan and his cohorts. But when people blatantly reject God's invitation, they dispatch themselves to hell eternally.

Hebrews 10:29 Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?

Jehoiakim had to have an absolutely evil heart to do what he did. He was not the only one who tried to destroy the Word of God, but they all failed. Look around, this

world is full of the enemies of God. Unfortunately, many so-called Christians are joining them by compromising the commandments of God for the sake of popularity, acceptability, and whatever their sorry-excuses.

All those who are trying to compromise, ignore, and destroy the Word of God forget this very important truth.

Matthew 24:35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.

They are fighting against the unbeatable foe, God and trying to destroy the eternal Word of God. Wrong enemies to fight against.

D. A HALF HEARTED WIMP

Jeremiah 38:5-6 Then Zedekiah the king said, "Look, he is in your hand. For the king can do nothing against you." 6 So they took Jeremiah and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah the king's son, which was in the court of the prison, and they let Jeremiah down with ropes. And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire. So Jeremiah sank in the mire.

Jeremiah 38:14-16 Then Zedekiah the king sent and had Jeremiah the prophet brought to him at the third entrance of the house of the Lord. And the king said to Jeremiah, "I will ask you something. Hide nothing from me." 15

Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "If I declare it to you, will you not surely put me to death? And if I give you advice, you will not listen to me." 16 So Zedekiah the king swore secretly to Jeremiah, saying, "As the Lord lives, who made our very souls, I will not put you to death, nor will I give you into the hand of these men who seek your life."

Jeremiah 38:19-20 And Zedekiah the king said to Jeremiah, "I am afraid of the Jews who have defected to the Chaldeans, lest they deliver me into their hand, and they abuse me." 20 But Jeremiah said, "They shall not deliver you. Please, obey the voice of the Lord which I speak to you. So it shall be well with you, and your soul shall live."

If we went through what Jeremiah did in his ministry, many of us would have chucked the ministry and have gone somewhere else. I wonder what was going through Jeremiah's mind while he was stuck in the sinking mire of the well.

Somehow, we have a false idea that if we are true in our service to the Lord, everything should go the way we want and we should be treated well by everyone. To much of the Word of Faith Movement heresy teachers' dismay, not all the men and women of God get to have healthy and wealthy lives. They would say, "We are healthy and wealthy," of course, they are, because they are a bunch of con-artists. If they are true believers with a tremendous amount of faith, let them do their ministry without begging on TV.

King Zedekiah had been appointed as king of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, after a siege of Jerusalem in 597 B.C. Though he was a king, he was pretty much a figurehead without real power. That's why he was afraid of the princes, the ones who had the actual power. He had a half-hearted mindset like many people. He wanted to hear from God, but didn't want to do what he heard from Him.

The Lord gave this spineless king one last chance to repent, but he only made more excuses why he couldn't follow God. How many people do we know who have more excuses why-they-cannot-or-will-not-follow-the-Lord than you can count?

The Lord allows a sinful nation to have the leaders whom they deserve. A couple of good examples are king Saul and president Obama. The ancient Jews wanted to be like other kingdoms that were around them by having their own human king instead of God as their king. They got one, totally good looking, but disobedient and empty headed. The American people bought the line of "Change and Hope we can believe in." We sure got changes in our pockets and our hope dashed in.

E. GOD TAKES CARE OF HIS SERVANT

Jeremiah 39:4-7 So it was, when Zedekiah the king of Judah and all the men of war saw them, that they fled and went out of the city by night, by way of the king's garden, by the gate between the two walls. And he went out by way of the plain. 5 But the Chaldean army pursued them and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho. And when they had captured him, they brought him up to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, to Riblah in the land of Hamath, where he pronounced judgment on him. 6 Then the king of Babylon killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes in Riblah; the king of Babylon also killed all the nobles of Judah. 7 Moreover he put out Zedekiah's eyes, and bound him with bronze fetters to carry him off to Babylon.

Jeremiah 39:11-12 Now Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon gave charge concerning Jeremiah to Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard, saying, 12 "Take him and look after him, and do him no harm; but do to him just as he says to you."

Jeremiah 39:17-18 But I will deliver you in that day," says the Lord, "and you shall not be given into the hand of the men of whom you are afraid. 18 For I will surely deliver you, and you shall not fall by the sword; but your life shall be as a prize to you, because you have put your trust in Me," says the Lord."

The siege began in 588 and finished 586, B.C. The "Times of the Gentiles" had begun on God's prophetic calendar. When that period ends, the Messiah will return to rescue His people at the Second Coming and fulfill the promises made by the prophets.

Since the Lord promised to Jeremiah that he would survive all the persecution against him. He moved Nebuchadnezzar's heart to take care of Jeremiah.

Proverbs 16:7 When a man's ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) The wickedness of men hasn't changed throughout history. We are not sinners, because we sin; rather we sin, because we are sinners from birth.

2) God's Word is ever true, cannot be destroyed. Anyone who stands against it will perish.