

Jeremiah's Scroll

March 30, 2025

Welcome to the Beamsville Church of Christ Online Ministry. This week's message is titled, "Jeremiah's Scroll." Thank you to Ed, Janet, and Ashley for being part of the service. The scripture reading is 2 Kings 22. Happy birthday this week to John, Jenny, and Ann.

Scripture Reading

2 Kings 22 (NIV)

Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem thirty-one years. His mother's name was Jedidah daughter of Adaiah; she was from Bozkath. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and followed completely the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left.

In the eighteenth year of his reign, King Josiah sent the secretary, Shaphan son of Azaliah, the son of Meshullam, to the temple of the Lord. He said: "Go up to Hilkiah the high priest and have him get ready the money that has been brought into the temple of the Lord, which the doorkeepers have collected from the people. Have them entrust it to the men appointed to supervise the work on the temple. And have these men pay the workers who repair the temple of the Lord—the carpenters, the builders and the masons. Also have them purchase timber and dressed stone to repair the temple. But they need not account for the money entrusted to them, because they are honest in their dealings."

Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the Book of the Law in the temple of the Lord." He gave it to Shaphan, who read it. Then Shaphan the secretary went to the king and reported to him: "Your officials have paid out the money that was in the temple of the Lord and have entrusted it to the workers and supervisors at the temple." Then Shaphan the secretary informed the king, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read from it in the presence of the king.

When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his robes. He gave these orders to Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Akbor son of Micaiah, Shaphan the secretary and Asaiah the king's attendant: "Go and inquire of the Lord for me and for the people and for all Judah about what is written in this book that has been found. Great is the Lord's anger that burns against us because those who have gone before us have not obeyed the words of this book; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written there concerning us."

Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Akbor, Shaphan and Asaiah went to speak to the prophet Huldah, who was the wife of Shallum son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe. She lived in Jerusalem, in the New Quarter.

She said to them, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: Tell the man who sent you to me, 'This is what the Lord says: I am going to bring disaster on this place and its people, according to everything written in the book the king of Judah has read. Because they have forsaken me and burned incense to other gods and aroused my anger by all the idols their hands have made, my

anger will burn against this place and will not be quenched.' Tell the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the Lord, 'This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says concerning the words you heard: Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before the Lord when you heard what I have spoken against this place and its people—that they would become a curse and be laid waste—and because you tore your robes and wept in my presence, I also have heard you, declares the Lord. Therefore I will gather you to your ancestors, and you will be buried in peace. Your eyes will not see all the disaster I am going to bring on this place.'”

So they took her answer back to the king.

Sermon

Jeremiah's Scroll

I'm not sure I meet the minimum height requirement to participate in this service. Well, good morning.

[Good morning.] I've got to say this, being here today, speaking to you remains weird and surprising and beautiful. For the first time, I have the opportunity to speak to the whole of a congregation in a regular service. And for that first time to be within the tradition that has shaped me and made me who I am is a real gift. I want to serve the church and I belong first to this group called Churches of Christ. And while I'm not sure it would be true to say there's nowhere else I'd rather be, not always anyway, there's nowhere else I'm supposed to be. So thank you for inviting me today. So with that said, it's time to look at our texts.

What a great story we heard. Thank you for that reading. Good job with the names. I'm not actually going to be spending, this is almost background, I'm not going to be spending most of our time here. But we need to start here briefly. It's the first of kind of two stories that we'll look at as we consider the question, what do we do when we come to God's will? We come to God's word, to the to the mirror that it provides to our lives. And we're troubled by what we see. What do we do in the moment where we think we've taken grasp of a text and find out it's taken grasp of us? And I think we'll see in these two stories that the right answer is to wrestle with the text and let the text win. Okay, so the reading was from Kings because believe it or not, that was the shorter option.

The book of Chronicles, as it so often does, actually slows down a bit over Josiah's life and gives us more detail than we get in the book of Kings. So in 2 Chronicles 34, we'll see that this moment of hearing God's word for the first time in no one's really sure how long. Hearing God's word and repenting on behalf of the nation is really the culmination of Josiah's kind of lifelong search for God.

Josiah's eight when he takes the throne. And then in the eighth year of his reign, so he's 16, he began to seek the God of David, his father, that 2 Chronicles 34, 3. I think that's a really interesting age. We're fairly sure it's the age at which he first married based on numbers and things. And it's probably the age at which he starts to get real authority in the nation as king. No one's giving an eight-year-old real authority to declare war and such. So he's an adult now, 16 and 18. So he's an adult now, 16 and an adult and married and ruling a nation. And as someone responsible for the kingdom and maybe even more terrifyingly responsible for a family, he knows he's got to have a basis, a foundation for this. He makes God his priority. And he has the wisdom to know that God is

what it's going to take to do right by his people. And to do right by his family. But it takes him a while to figure out what to actually do. What does that mean?

And so in the 12th year of his reign at 20, he begins to rid the land of idols and shrines, even without the covenant document, God's book of the law. Somehow he knows that's not what God wants. And finally, in the 18th year of his reign, so now he's 26, he orders the restoration of the Lord's temple. He's had at least 10 years of intentionally pursuing God, of incrementally making improvements to the faithfulness of God's people. And it's in this process that something significant happens, which we heard read. So Josiah, you know, his rule follows in fact decades of horrific idolatry, immorality, injustice, total lack of faithfulness to what God has called them to do. And what we sometimes call the law, this book that is Israel's covenant document has gone missing.

Maybe it was intentionally hidden away by some faithful remnant trying to protect it. Maybe it got dropped in a filing cabinet and forgotten because it had become so important, pardon, so unimportant. But one of the king's officials reads it and realizes what utter breach of the covenant the nation finds itself in. They have broken all the wedding vows. And he panics. And so he takes it to King Josiah, who reads it and panics. And then sends several of his officials to the wife of a paper pusher who's known to be a prophet. And this woman named Huldah assures him that God sees and will reward his faithfulness. That while judgment is coming, it's not coming in Josiah's time, a time that's been marked by repentance and renewal and restoration. Great story. But now let's fast forward 15 or 20 years to the events recorded in Jeremiah 36.

Josiah has died. One of his sons, Jehoiakim, is on the throne. And God speaks to Jeremiah and says, "You need to sit down with Baruch the scribe and recite to him every oracle I've given you since you first began your ministry." See, Josiah's reforms died with him. And these people need shaken out of their backsliding and complacency. It's time for theological shock and awe. These people need Jeremiah the definitive edition.

So they get to work. And it's a massive project. This is no weekend cram session. God has said a lot to Jeremiah. And Baruch has a day job. Remember that in this world, being able to write is a professional skill. You know, you pull up the LinkedIn, "Oh, this guy can read and write. We need him in our company." Maybe it's akin to modern web design or modern video editing. A few people can do it really well and deserve to get paid for it. A few people can do it adequately, and most of us wouldn't know where to start. And it's not like Baruch can just run to staples for some sheepskin and ink. Parchment has to be prepared. Ink has to be prepared. Somebody has got to be funding this project that in terms of materials and labor, probably costs the equivalent of several thousand modern dollars. This project is enormous. This project is expensive, and it takes time to create this one precious document. But at last it's finished. Finally, it's ready to be read.

And Jeremiah delegates the reading to Baruch. "They don't let me in the temple anymore," he says, "because they don't like what I have to say. Time for you to step up, Baruch. Take God's word to God's house and read it there." So Baruch takes it and reads it in the temple courts. Priests undertaking the details of their daily ministry. Levites literally doing the heavy lifting. People coming in for cleansing or sacrifices or vows or health concerns. An entire cross-section of God's people is hearing Baruch read these words of God's anger at his people's covenant failure. How far short they've fallen. And that judgment is coming.

And these words catch the attention of a young official, Micaiah, son of Gemariah, son of Shaphan. And if we've been tracking all the details of all of the stories, we know this is exactly the right guy to hear these words. He's Shaphan's grandson. Woo, Shaphan! I know you're all cheering in your minds. Or maybe you've said, "Hold up, who is that again?"

Shaphan is one of the coolest guys in scripture we never talk about. In the story of Josiah and finding the scroll, he's the one to whom Hilkiah gives the newly found book of Allah. He's the one who reads it and panics and takes it to Josiah. And along with his son, Ahikam, he's part of the delegation of officials who sought the direction of Huldah the Prophet. Along with three of his sons and two of his grandsons, Shaphan and his family constitute one of the most quietly faithful families in scripture in the mostly ugly twilight years of the Judean kingdom.

So this Micaiah guy, Shaphan's grandson, hears Baruch's preaching and reports to the other officials of the royal court, including his father, Gemariah. Worried, troubled by this message that they're hearing, they call Baruch and interview him, they ascertain that he is indeed preaching Jeremiah's words at Jeremiah's direction and have him perform a private reading just for them. As happened in the time when the book of the law was found, Josiah's time, these officials realize that the situation is grave. As was true in Josiah's time, the nation once again has defaulted on their covenant with God. Once again, the king has to be warned. And then they tell Baruch to get Jeremiah and get out of town, no forwarding address.

Wait, that's different. These two stories have tracked pretty closely so far. Now they've diverged. Get out of town, go into hiding? But Baruch doesn't seem to object. He doesn't even seem to be surprised. He hops in a getaway car and the officials report to King Jehoiakim, who tells them to bring the scroll and read it. And one of the scribes sits down and begins to read. And after a bit of reading, the king stops him and says, "Hey, give me your knife for a minute." And dutifully the scribe hands over the knife and Jehoiakim cuts off the bit that's been read and throws it in the fire and watches it burn. And he tells them to keep going. And after a bit stops him again and cuts off the part that's been read and throws it in the fire and watches it burn. And he does this over and over and over and over again until the whole scroll, the entire reparate of God's words to Jeremiah is gone, burned up.

And once that's happened, Jehoiakim tosses the knife back to the scribe and sends some of his men to go find the prophet. And he says, "Okay, the stories have realigned only not. He doesn't want to consult the prophet like his father Josiah. He wants Jeremiah and Baruch arrested and not for the first time. He has sent his special forces as far as Egypt before to capture prophets and bring them back to kill them." You can read about that in Jeremiah 26. "It is time to rid the land of a couple more malcontents, a couple of inconveniences. In this time of political instability, he doesn't need people rocking the status quo."

Jehoiakim may be Josiah's son, but a bit of genetic material is all they share. King Josiah submitted himself to God's word. He accepted God's judgment, his rebuke. Jehoiakim, his son, doesn't submit, will not submit. God's word exists to serve him. Josiah would be mastered by God's word. Jehoiakim believes himself master over them. There's something incredibly cold about burning the scroll of God's word and ordering the arrest and execution of God's prophets.

Good thing this sort of disregard for God and his word is a limited occurrence, right? Well, but I mean in the early second century, this guy named Marcion absolutely couldn't accept that this Old Testament nonsense was God as we know him. And believed that portraying Jesus as a human in the Gospels was far beneath the dignity of a transcendent divine being. He recreated the biblical canon according to his own theology, accepting only Paul's letters and a very heavily edited version of Luke as real Christian scripture.

And then there's more recently, in the early 1800s, Thomas Jefferson edited together a work that he called the life and morals of Jesus of Nazareth. Using a razor and glue, he edited together a new and enlightened gospel for a new and enlightened age. He said that the material which is "evidently Jesus is as easily distinguishable as diamonds in a dung hill." Only part of the gospel is diamonds. He said that the supernatural material in the Gospels had, and again, I quote, "muffled the most sublime and benevolent code of morals which has ever been offered to man." All that miracle nonsense really gets in the way, doesn't it? Jefferson rejected every one of Jesus' miracles, most mention of the supernatural, all reference to Jesus' divinity, and all the resurrection accounts. Cool. Jefferson just gave us Palestinian Mr. Rogers. Won't you be his neighbor?

Jesus himself dealt with this devaluing and ignoring of scripture among his opponents. Among the Jewish leadership of his day, there were texts they loved, texts that talked about the coming warrior who would lay the smackdown on Rome, texts that talked about making Israel great again, texts that talked about God vindicating his people in the sight of those mean and, let's face it, icky Gentiles.

Sure, there were texts about a suffering servant and coming disaster and righteous remnants. There were texts that talked about including people of other tribes and languages and people and nations, but those texts were uncomfortable. Those texts didn't preach, they didn't fit with what they wanted from God, didn't fit with who they wanted God to be. So they were studiously ignored. And Jesus' refusal to play the game and tow the party line is a huge part of what made people angry enough to see him killed. He came to teach a bunch of people who avoided the whole counsel of God. He came to die for a bunch of people who were angry that he called them out on their half-hearted obedience and avoidance of the truth.

What about us? What texts turn blurry when our eyes land on them? What texts bounce off our hearts instead of penetrating them? You uncomfortable maybe with texts about miraculous healing? I am. James 5, 14 and 15, "Is anyone among you sick? He should call for the elders of the church and there to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick person and the Lord will raise him up." On my bad days, that text can take a hike. You uncomfortable with texts that have things to say about the exclusivity of Jesus? Care for the poor and the homeless? Human sexuality? Rejection of worldly power and influence? Hell? Money? I have no doubt if I go on long enough, eventually I can make all of us uncomfortable. God's Word will roll over our toes. And our impulse when we're uncomfortable is to pull in, to avoid that discomfort.

Brothers and sisters, let me urge you today to run toward the discomfort. Embrace the difficult things you find in God's Word. Leave your toes out. Step on the Legos of God's Word. Wrestle with the text and let the text win. Because God's Word to us is good. Even when we're uncertain. Even when it's hard. Even when it's warning and rebuke. Even when it hurts.

That's what Jesus did. For us and for our salvation, He pulled back nothing. Even when He knew God's Word would lead Him to a cross, to a place of humiliation and death. But He knew that the Father loved Him. God's rebuke and warning and hard things come from His love. He knew the Father loved Him and that was enough to sustain Him through the most terrible thing that could possibly be asked of Him.

So today, know that the Father loves you. God will never require more of us than He required of Himself. So even when what God asks of you is hard, run toward it. Radical obedience becomes possible and even reasonable when we realize that our hearts, our lives, are cherished in His good hands. Thank you.

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