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Called to Speak for the Lord – the Book of Jeremiah

The Source of All Joy and Fishing
for Men

February 21, 2021

Sermon Text: Jeremiah 16

Scripture Reading: Matthew 4:12-22

I hope that we are all coming to understand more clearly that a proper understanding of the Bible requires letting Scripture interpret Scripture. This not only means that we pay close attention to the *context* that a passage appears in, but that we make proper use of the Old and New Testaments.

By this, I mean that when we are reading the Old Testament, quite often we will find an OT passage interpreted and applied by the New Testament. And this is true the other way around as well – The New Testament is only properly understood and opened up

when we know its connection with the Old Testament. For example, the Book of Revelation will become a loose cannon firing off in all kinds of crazy directions in the hands of fools unless the Old Testament quotations and allusions in it are understood. (Revelation by the way has more OT quotes and allusions than any other NT book).

Our text here in Jeremiah 16 is a very plain example of this. We cannot appreciate what the Lord is saying here without connecting the dots to the New Testament. And what we will find when we do so is that the New Testament passage opens up in such a way as will give us a HUGE appreciation for what the Lord has done for us in Christ.

So let's begin –

Jeremiah 16:1-21 ESV The word of the LORD came to me: (2) “You shall not take a wife, nor shall you have sons or daughters in this place. (3) For thus says the LORD concerning the sons and daughters who are born in this place, and concerning the mothers who bore

them and the fathers who fathered them in this land: (4) They shall die of deadly diseases. They shall not be lamented, nor shall they be buried. They shall be as dung on the surface of the ground. They shall perish by the sword and by famine, and their dead bodies shall be food for the birds of the air and for the beasts of the earth.

(5) “For thus says the LORD: Do not enter the house of mourning, or go to lament or grieve for them, for I have taken away my peace from this people, my steadfast love and mercy, declares the LORD. (6) Both great and small shall die in this land. They shall not be buried, and no one shall lament for them or cut himself or make himself bald for them.

(7) No one shall break bread for the mourner, to comfort him for the dead, nor shall anyone give him the cup of consolation to drink for his father or his mother. (8) You shall not go into the house of feasting to sit with them, to eat and drink.

(9) For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I will silence in this place, before your eyes and in your days, the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the

bridegroom and the voice of the bride.

(10) “And when you tell this people all these words, and they say to you, ‘Why has the LORD pronounced all this great evil against us? What is our iniquity? What is the sin that we have committed against the LORD our God?’

(11) then you shall say to them: ‘Because your fathers have forsaken me, declares the LORD, and have gone after other gods and have served and worshiped them, and have forsaken me and have not kept my law, (12) and because you have done worse than your fathers, for behold, every one of you follows his stubborn, evil will, refusing to listen to me. (13) Therefore I will hurl you out of this land into a land that neither you nor your fathers have known, and there you shall serve other gods day and night, for I will show you no favor.’

(14) “Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when it shall no longer be said, ‘As the LORD lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt,’ (15) but ‘As the LORD lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them.’

For I will bring them back to their own land that I gave to their fathers.

(16) “Behold, I am sending for many fishers, declares the LORD, and they shall catch them. And afterward I will send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain and every hill, and out of the clefts of the rocks.

(17) For my eyes are on all their ways. They are not hidden from me, nor is their iniquity concealed from my eyes. (18) But first I will doubly repay their iniquity and their sin, because they have polluted my land with the carcasses of their detestable idols, and have filled my inheritance with their abominations.”

(19) O LORD, my strength and my stronghold, my refuge in the day of trouble, to you shall the nations come from the ends of the earth and say: “Our fathers have inherited nothing but lies, worthless things in which there is no profit. (20) Can man make for himself gods? Such are not gods!” (21) “Therefore, behold, I will make them know, this once I will make them know my power and my might, and they shall know that my name is the LORD.”

First, consider the judgment Jeremiah’s countrymen had brought upon themselves. It was their own doing. Their question of Jeremiah, a wicked denial of their evil, is mind-boggling:

(10) “And when you tell this people all these words, and they say to you, ‘Why has the LORD pronounced all this great evil against us? What is our iniquity? What is the sin that we have committed against the LORD our God?’

So hardened were they in their sin, that they would even dare to ask this accusatory question. It really is an accusation against the Lord. “Why?” “What?” “What sin?” And yet their land was filled with it. In every house, on every hill, in the Lord’s temple – idols and all the wickedness that goes along with that idolatry. A willful disobedience of God’s Law. A rebellion against the covenant. Smashing of all 10 commandments as a matter of course.

And yet, “why? What have we done? Why is He doing this to us?”

Notice also that they really know that Jeremiah is indeed the Lord’s prophet – else they wouldn’t be asking him this

question.

Now, the judgment to be brought upon them at the hands of the invaders from the north, is this:

(9) For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I will silence in this place, before your eyes and in your days, the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride.

You see it also in verse 5 -

(5) “For thus says the LORD: Do not enter the house of mourning, or go to lament or grieve for them, for I have taken away my peace from this people, my steadfast love and mercy, declares the LORD.

Now, let’s think very, very carefully about this.

Jeremiah is to model this vacuum of joy that is coming. He is not to marry. Nor is he to have children. Why? Because these are sources of joy, and the Lord is removing all joy. Nor is Jeremiah to go visit people who are mourning over the death of a loved one. Why? Because the Lord is removing all comfort from these

people as well. And notice now how the Lord puts it –

“...for I have taken away my peace from this people, my steadfast love and mercy...”.

In this, we must understand:

The Lord is the source of all joy. Of all that is good. He is the fountain from which all true pleasure springs. Celebration, gladness, peacefulness, love, mercy...all emanate ultimately from Him. Ultimately and finally, He withdraws these blessings from those who persist in unrepentance, unbelief, and sin.

Therefore, anyone living apart from Him, rejecting Christ, hating God’s Word, *cannot truly know any of these things. True joy, real goodness, authentic pleasure, are founded upon and spring from Christ.*

James 1:17 ESV Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

Now, think on this very, very seriously

and soberly.

One chief misery of hell is that it will be a total vacuum of anything good. There will be no joy – not even a crumb. There will be no gladness – not even for a microsecond. No love. No mercy. No comfort. And it is all due to the absence of the Lord who is the source of all things good.

Man in his sin fancies himself to be happy. He parties on in various ways. For a time, the Lord is kind even to those who hate Him. He gives them good things that they do not deserve, desiring that they come to repentance. That is what had happened in Jeremiah's nation of Judah – until these words were pronounced:

I have taken away my peace from this people, my steadfast love and mercy,

Without Christ, man cannot know true joy. He experiences perhaps short term flickers of it, but that flame soon goes out and sets himself to get it lit once again.

Psalms 4:7-8 ESV You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound. (8) In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for

you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.

Psalms 92:4 ESV For you, O LORD, have made me glad by your work; at the works of your hands I sing for joy.

Psalms 16:11 ESV You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Jeremiah gives us then a temporal, earthly vision of hell. The terror of the invaders, the famine, death...all of it is a warning to the wicked of where a life lived in rebellion against the Lord leads.

In contrast, *the fullness of joy we will have when we are with Christ is far beyond our ability to grasp right now. In His presence is fullness of joy.* Now, we only experience and taste His joy in part. What will its fullness be? Very soon we will know!

Fishers of Men

If you grew up in Sunday School you no doubt were taught that children's song "Fishers of Men." It's a good song in that it is Scripture, taken from the text we read earlier in Matthew 4 –

Matthew 4:18-20 ESV While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. (19) And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” (20) Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

Now this is a perfect example of what I mentioned earlier – understanding the Old Testament by the light of the NT, and the other way round! Let me show you:

Jeremiah 16:14-18 ESV “Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when it shall no longer be said, ‘As the LORD lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt,’ (15) but ‘As the LORD lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them.’ For I will bring them back to their own land that I gave to their fathers.

(16) “Behold, I am sending for many **fishers**, declares the LORD, and they shall catch them. And afterward I will send for many **hunters**, and they shall

hunt them from every mountain and every hill, and out of the clefts of the rocks.

(17) For my eyes are on all their ways. They are not hidden from me, nor is their iniquity concealed from my eyes. (18) But first I will doubly repay their iniquity and their sin, because they have polluted my land with the carcasses of their detestable idols, and have filled my inheritance with their abominations.”

In particular, look at verse 16. It is a bit difficult because we don’t know if it goes with vs 14-15 (the Lord’s promise to bring His people back to the Land after captivity) OR with the following verses, 17-18 which speak of His judgment on them for idolatry. In other words –

Are the fishers and hunters seeking out the captives to return them to the land (vs 14-15), OR are the fishers and hunters seeking out the wicked in order to capture them for judgment?

The commentators I looked at for the most part conclude that the fishers and hunters are seeking out the wicked for judgment. If that is the case, it still throws real light on our understanding

of Matthew 4 as I will show you in a moment. But the surprising thing is that typically the commentators make no connection of verse 16 with Matthew 4. *And that is a great error because we miss the full import of Christ's words.*

Look at these verses right next to each other:

(Jer 16:16) "Behold, I am sending for many **fishers**, declares the LORD, and they shall catch them. And afterward I will send for many **hunters**, and they shall hunt them from every mountain and every hill, and out of the clefts of the rocks.

(Mat 4:19) And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you **fishers of men.**"

Understand? It is obvious that Jesus had Jeremiah 16:16 in mind when He called Apostles who had been literal fishermen and told them He would make them fishers of men. And if WE don't make that connection, we really miss the core of what this means.

IF Jeremiah 16 means fishers and hunters of the wicked (who are hiding from the Lord in the mountains, hills

and rocks trying to escape His judgment (consistent with the cry of the wicked in Revelation for the rocks and hills to fall on them to hide them from the wrath of the Lamb) *then what Jesus is telling the Apostles (and us) is that He is going to now send out a new kind of fishermen and hunters!* These will not be fishing for the wicked to bring them to judgment, but they will be fishing for God's real people, hunting them out from wherever they are through the preaching of the gospel, and returning them to "the Land" (ie, the New Creation).

And if Jer 16 is speaking of the many fishers and hunters being sent out in a positive sense, to bring the Jews back to the Land from captivity, then Jesus here in Matthew 4 is showing us that *there is another Exodus for us. This Exodus is a leaving of this present evil world and it is effected by the gospel being used as God's "hook" to catch all of His people and bring them home.*

But do you see the main point here? The Old Testament is a temporal, earthly, physical picture (a "type") of the reality of God in the New Covenant in Christ, using fishermen to seek out His people and gather them to Himself.

And there is very probably another conclusion in all this. Namely, *that the gospel of Christ is a two-edged sword. It hooks those who believe in Christ and brings them into Christ's kingdom, and at the same time it hooks the wicked, pronouncing and effecting judgment upon them for their rejection of Christ.*

There is, therefore, right now, a great fishing and hunting operation going on. And it is so effective that no matter where any of Christ's sheep are, he is going to find them and bring them home. And conversely, it is so effective that no matter where the wicked hide, the Lord will surely hook them and bring them to judgment.

These things are meant to be a sober warning to anyone who is rejecting Christ, refusing to come to Him in repentance and faith. And they are meant to be a great encouragement to all who belong to Him.