

Jeremiah 8: 1-22; “There is a Balm in Gilead”, Sermon # 8 in the series –
“Heart Lessons Learned for a Prophet and the People of God”,
Delivered on April 7th, 2013, by Pastor Paul Rendall
in the Afternoon Worship Service.

We have here, in this passage of Holy Scripture, everyone asking questions. We have God asking questions; we have the prophet Jeremiah asking questions, and we have the people of Judah and Jerusalem asking questions. God does not ask questions as if He does not know the answer; for He knows everything. He asks questions in order to point out matters which are of importance to us, and because they are of importance to Him; matters related to our salvation and our obedience to Him. We ask questions for various reasons; either because we sincerely do not know or understand, or because we are not pleased with the way that God or men are treating us, and we are really then making a complaint to God or about men. These many questions in our text bring astonishing answers. Jeremiah says in verse 21 – “Astonishment has taken hold of me.” He is thinking, “Is there no way for the people that I love to be saved?” “Is there no balm in Gilead?” “Is there no physician there?”

Perhaps you can identify with Jeremiah. Perhaps you have loved ones and friends who are not saved, and you long for them to be awakened and converted so that they might not be destroyed by their living for what is false; by their living in their neglect of God, and in their rebellion against His Word. You know that the only balm that will be found for them is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the only Physician for sin-sick souls. So this afternoon let us see how Jesus Christ is the balm of Gilead. We want to see, 1st of all, that the Lord Jesus Christ alone has the balm which brings right speech. 2nd – We want to see that He alone has the balm which brings wisdom. 3rd – We want to see that He alone has the balm which brings the right kind of silence. And 4th – We want to see that He alone has the balm which brings recovery.

1st of all – The Lord Jesus Christ alone has balm which brings right speech.
(verses 4-7)

Sin is pictured for us here in several ways. It is pictured as a fall; a fall from the great privileges and offers of mercy and grace which God gives to all who respond to His calls to repent. Sin always brings men down while it promises to lift them up. God had given privileges to His peculiar favored people, but they had corrupted His true worship and despised God Himself by substituting the worship of the Queen of Heaven and other false religious practices in the place of God’s worship. This even came to the place where, thinking that they were really worshipping, they burned their sons and daughters in the fire to the god Molech. To walk with God is to esteem your privileges which He has given you. It is to be upright before Him. But the people had been so deceived by their sin that they failed to see the Pit of Judgment and hell that they were falling into. Let me exhort all of us, but especially our young people here today; you have been given such great privileges in being a part of God’s true worship. Will you not pray for grace to understand how to glorify Him with your life and strength?

Think of what happened to Adam and Eve at the beginning of the world. They were created upright; they loved God and had the holy privileges of fellowship and communion with Him in the garden. Their hearts were inclined to do what was right. Their thoughts and their actions were untainted by sin, but the Satan deceived Eve, and both she and Adam fell from their original righteousness. Now our whole race is fallen in sin, fallen in nature. This one sin was a fall into spiritual death, making all men liable to physical death and eternal punishment. And God here asks Judah and Jerusalem a question, and he asks you as well. Will you fall, or will you rise from your death in sins? Will you turn away and leave the true worship of God, or will you rise to embrace God’s purpose for your life. The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. It is drawing near to God, not drawing back from Him. Sin is a turning from God, sliding back

from God, even though it will mean death and judgment. This is how awfully men are deceived unless the grace of God intervenes. But there is a balm in Gilead.

Gilead was a place not far from Israel where there was plenty of balm, and so many doctors of that day settled there. Balm is a balsamic resin, especially one from a small tropical evergreen tree. And an aromatic preparation was made from that resin into a healing ointment. But Jeremiah is not speaking of literal physical balm, but he is speaking of the spiritual balm which only the Lord Jesus Christ can bring and give to sinners. The balm for men's sins is to be found in the preaching of God's Word the Bible. God never stands aloof in matters relating to the preaching of His Word and the gospel. "God, in His will of desire, is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance," it says in 2 Peter 2: 9. God has commanded that all men everywhere repent, for He has fixed a Day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through the man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof by raising Him from the dead." (Acts 17: 30 and 31) God listens to the language of your heart, and He perceives the slightest movement of desire there. He listens to what we say about Him and about ourselves. In our text He says, "No man repented of His wickedness, saying, 'What have I done?'" "The proof of the deep depravity of their hearts, was that they did not ask, 'What have I done?'" And it the same even today, perhaps even in the heart of someone listening to me. But there is a balm in Gilead. There is a remedy that brings right speech.

It talks here in verse 7 about the stork in the heavens knowing her appointed times; the turtledove, the swift and the swallow observing the time of their coming, but the people of that day did not know the judgment of the Lord. But you who are listening to me do not need to be like them. If you see the disease of sin in your soul; if you know that it has wounded you, and ruined many good things which the Lord has given you; then seek for the balm of Gilead. Arise and call for the Great Physician. It is not the healthy who need a physician, but it is those who are sick. The Son of Man has not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. And to back-sliding Christians He says buy the balm, the eye-salve for your eyes that you may see spiritually, the lip-balm for your lips, that you may call upon His name, and learn to speak right things, like, "What have I done?" And turning to the Great Physician, apply to Him for the remedy. Buy from Him gold refined in the fire, that you may be truly rich, white garments, that you may be clothed, and that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed. Know that now is the day of salvation, now is the accepted time. Jeremiah 29: 12 says, "Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you." "And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all of your heart." "I will be found by you says the Lord, and I will bring you back from your captivity."

2nd – We want to see that Christ alone has the balm which brings wisdom.

(verses 6-12)

"How can you say we are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us?" "Look, the false pen of the scribe certainly works falsehood." "The wise men are ashamed, they are dismayed and taken." "Behold they have rejected the word of the Lord; so what wisdom do they have?" Here we have a direct correlation between having wisdom and having the Word of God. And certainly we need to understand this; that the Scriptures are able to make wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. "The Law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul, the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple." And here in our text, in verse 8, it says that the pen of the scribe was at work copying down the letters, and words, and passages of God's law. But it is called a false pen working falsehood. They added stories of their own, traditions of their own, interpretations of their own, that led the people astray. It shows the rejection of the Word of God when men add to it, or take away from it, or twist it so that it is not believed. "Behold they have rejected the word of the Lord; so what wisdom do they have?"

Turn with me over to James Chapter 3: 13-18. "Who is wise and understanding among you?" "Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom." "But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth." "This

wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic.” “For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.” “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.” “Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” We show ourselves to be truly wise when we engage in good works, and this is shown forth in our good conduct in the meekness of wisdom. James is saying that it is very important to God how we do our good works, and what impulse and motive we do them from. Some people may claim to doing the Lord’s work who are doing it out of bitter envy and self-seeking. Do not boast of that kind of wisdom, James says; don’t lie against the truth. We need to understand that people can say that they are wise, when all the while it is worldly wisdom.

How can you tell if a person has the true wisdom, the wisdom from above? It is first pure. The person who is wise does not reject the Word of God speaking to him. Proverbs 30, verse 5 – “Every word of God is pure.” “He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him.” “Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you and you be found a liar.” And what God expects of those who know Him, is that they would convey His purity in their speech. Proverbs 15: 26 – “The words of the pure are pleasant.” They are also peaceable and gentle. Ask yourself, is this the way that I speak; is this the way that I am? Or am I harsh and provoking in my attitude. Am I easily entreated, approachable, willing to yield, or am I like a porcupine? “Am I like Ishmael who hand was against every man and every man, as a result, against me? The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. Only Christ has the balm of grace that can bring us the wisdom which leads to good speech and good conduct on our part.

3rd – We want to see that Christ alone has the balm which brings the right kind of silence. (verses 14-17)

In verse 14 it says – “Why do we sit still?” “Assemble yourselves and let us enter the fortified cities and let us be silent there.” “For the Lord God has put us to silence.” This can be understood of those who had been truly convicted of their sins and humbled under the chastening hand of God. Or perhaps it could refer to those who had given up all hope and who wanted to sit in a sullen silence because they despaired of mercy. Perhaps both are included in these words. If you will notice, there has been true and false throughout this passage. It is so here as well. There is a true and good silence, and there is a false and evil silence as well. The good silence is when we have really become convinced that we are sinners by the Word of God. It says in Romans Chapter 3: 19 – “Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.”

When we become convinced that we cannot be saved by the best of our works, or by the best of our intentions, it shuts up our boasting; our self-justifying words before God and men. We accept the verdict and seek for a Savior. Ecclesiastes 3: 7 says: “There is a time to keep silence and a time to speak.” When we are convinced that our sins have made us a reproach to our neighbor, and have made our God displeased with us, then if we come forth with the language of true repentance, we will find a balm for our sullen, sinful silence. Look over at Psalm 39, verse 1 – “I said I will guard my ways lest I sin with my tongue, I will restrain my mouth with a muzzle, while the wicked are before me.” “I was mute with silence.” His prayer that time is found in verses 7-9: “And now, Lord, what do I wait for?” “My hope is in You.” “Deliver me from all my transgressions.” “Do not make me the reproach of the foolish.” “I was mute, I did not open my mouth, because it was You who did it.” And look over at Psalm 62, verse 1, as well. “Truly my soul silently waits for God; from Him comes my salvation.” “He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be greatly moved.”

The wrong kind of silence is a sullen silence. It does not submit to God, and it is saying in effect: “If this is the way you will deal with me God, then I will not speak to You.” But God even has a balm in Christ for this. “Jonah is a good example of this, in Jonah Chapter 4. You will recall that Jonah was angry with God because after he had preached to the Ninevites that they should repent,

and they did repent, God did not destroy them. He wanted them to be destroyed because of all the wicked things that they had done to Israel a few years before. He says, “Ah, Lord God, was not this what I said when I was still in my country?” “Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm.” “Therefore now, O Lord, take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!” “Then the Lord said, ‘Is it right for you to be angry?’” But look at how sinfully sullen Jonah is. “So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city.” “There he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city.”

“And the Lord God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery.” “So Jonah was very grateful for the plant.” “But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered.” “And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah’s head, so that he grew faint.” “Then he wished for death for himself, and said, ‘It is better for me to die than to live.’” “Then God said to Jonah, ‘Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?’” “And he said, ‘It is right for me to be angry, even to death!’” “But The Lord said, “You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night.” “And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left—and much livestock?”

And thus ends the book. Nothing but silence from Jonah. Was his hand over his mouth, or was he sullen and angry? We trust that God’s reproof was enough of a balm for the prophet to turn him from his sullen silence. But for these people in our text, the Lord showed most of them no mercy because they held on to their sullen silence. There would be for them, no cure. O unbelieving friend, please see that there is a balm in Jesus to heal the sin-sick soul. O dear Christian see that God knows how to apply the balm of Christ to your troubled soul, to heal the sores of bitterness over things that have not gone in the way that you think that they ought to.

And this leads us 4th - To see that Christ alone has the balm which brings recovery.
(verses 18-21)

The people to whom Jeremiah now ministered, considered themselves to be in a hopeless condition. And yet their hopeless resignation led on to paralysis. It is like a person with a disease which could be cured if they would only go to the doctor. “Is there no balm in Gilead?” “Is there no physician there?” It is a strange thing, is it not, when the physician weeps more over the patient’s condition than the patient does over himself. And yet, such was the case of our prophet Jeremiah who would see souls saved from sin; that killing disease that renders men, women, and children hopeless and helpless! He says in verse 21, “For the hurt of the daughter of my people I am hurt.” “I am mourning.” His heart was sorrowing and his heart was faint within him. He heard the voice, the cry of the daughter of his people from a far country – in captivity. “Is not the Lord in Zion?” “Is not her King in her?” And the answer from God was – “Why have they provoked Me to anger with their carved images and foreign idols?”

God is still provoked today by our idols; our greed, our covetousness, our immorality, and our deceitfulness and pride. But, if we will repent and ask, “What have I done?”, God will hear, and He will heal. There is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul. It is the balm of the gospel; repent and believe in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Jesus is the Great Physician who will pour the balm of His grace into the wounds of your heart. He will not heal you slightly or give you false peace. He will take away the love of sinning, and give you a New Heart and a New Mind. He will make you whole. May your soul be gathered in harvest to Jesus. Will you trust Him in the summer of your life? Then much fruit will be gathered in the harvest of the last day to Christ’s glory. Are you in the fall or winter of life? Trust Him still, for much good can be done even in a few years, and God can multiply the effects of what is given for Christ, and done for Him, to the praise of His glorious grace.

