

Sunday May 21st sermon: "Burning Up God's Word -- The LORD Preserves Scripture!"

Preached at the Lord's Table at Grace Bible Church in Greenwood, MS,  
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Jeremiah 36; Matthew 26:28

God's Word is truly wonderful! That He should love His creatures, made in His image, enough to give us His Word in written form, is astounding.

God made man to think and understand thoughts, and to develop vocabulary and language to express those thoughts. Indeed, some believe that without words to describe concepts, they cannot even be thought about in the mind of man.

God condescends to communicate with His creatures using ideas and words and speech and writing. How kind He is to delight to communicate and interact with such lowly creatures.

Paul teaches us that God's written word is "God breathed," or inspired by the Holy Ghost. He communicated it to faithful men whom He had chosen, strengthened, and raised up to record what He desires to tell us.

Some of these men faithfully recorded God's word to us in great danger and difficult circumstances. Many of the men who authored the Scriptures, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, were imprisoned, mistreated, and even put to death.

Then God raised up a host of faithful scribes, who copied out the Scriptures that they might be preserved and spread abroad to all men. Many faithful men transported and sometimes hid God's Word from wicked men who would destroy it.

Even those who translated God's Word into the common tongue were persecuted and murdered. The Roman Catholic church state murdered William Tyndale, a brilliant scholar of language who set the course for

the writings of Shakespeare and the King James translation of the Bible. Today, he is totally vindicated as a scholar of the very first rank, and yet he was strangled and burned at the stake, because he insisted on translating the words of the Bible accurately, and refused to accommodate the false doctrine of the Roman Catholic state church.

Now God's Word is well-nigh ubiquitous, and cannot be stamped out.

Yet so many value the Bible very little! It has become so common-place, and inexpensive, that it is not treasured as the miraculous word from almighty God.

On top of that, our sin and our corrupt nature, received from Adam's fall, has marred our ability to hear and understand and believe God's Word. We have the physical and technical ability aplenty, but our rebellion against God makes us spiritually unable to believe it.

We must have a miraculous work of regeneration by the Holy Ghost in our minds and hearts, to change our spiritual blindness into a clear sight of God's Word, before we can embrace it as the truth.

It is that rebellion and deadness in sin that leads many men to try to stamp out God's Word, because they hate God so.

Prophets and apostles were jailed or killed, translators murdered, and copies of God's Word repeatedly seized and destroyed by wicked men throughout the ages. Even today, whole nations seek to stamp out the teaching of God's Word.

Recently, the Satanists in England held a public mutilation of the Bible to demonstrate their hatred of God and rebellion against Him.

All that reminds us of the incident where wicked King Jehoiakim cut up and burned the book of Jeremiah, because God had promised destruction of his kingdom and the Babylonian captivity, because of Israel's great sin.

God had instructed Jeremiah to write down all his prophecies which God had spoken to him, and Jeremiah and his scribe Baruch did so.

But when the words of the book were read to the people at the temple, the rulers and priests caught wind of it, and had it read to them also. They were troubled by God's promises of their doom as a nation, and went to King Jehoiakim to inform him of the prophecies.

The wicked king hated God's Word as well, but he thought he had a solution: he cut up and burned Jeremiah's book, as it was being read to him!

At this point in the event, we should pause to think of all the beautiful Gospel hope and truth that the king destroyed. He destroyed not just the promises of God's judgment for the sin of Israel, but also the glorious promises of salvation and forgiveness that God had revealed to Jeremiah, and Jeremiah had recorded in his book.

Those words spoken to Jeremiah by the Holy Ghost, the king had just obliterated by his rebellious act.

These were words meant for our comfort and rescue by God! They were part of His revelation of how He would save us from our sin!

That wicked king destroyed those words.

For example, in Jeremiah 23, God excoriates the unfaithful shepherds who did not care for His people, His sheep. They did not feed the flock of God, nor lead it to safety. Rather, they helped to scatter and destroy the sheep.

God denounced those wicked shepherds, and promised that one day, He would appoint faithful replacements, and gather His sheep back to Himself, and provide for and protect them.

But then God reveals this glorious truth: that one day, He would raise up a king from the house of David, a Righteous Branch, to reign over and prosper and bring justice to His people!

This righteous King would save God's people, and He would be called by this name, "the LORD our Righteousness!"

Here is God's revelation in His Word of the imputed righteousness of Christ as our King. His righteousness will be accounted unto us! We have no righteousness of our own, only filthy rags.

But praise God, He promised us that His Messiah, the Lord Jesus, would be known as the LORD our Righteousness one day!

But the wicked king had destroyed these precious Gospel words of God!

A similar passage is found in Jeremiah 33, but something is added: God promises that this Branch of Righteousness, this great promised King, will also perform the good promises that God has made to His people.

But here, God goes further, when He declares that His people will be called by the King's name, "the LORD our Righteousness!"

Not only will we be clothed with the righteousness of Messiah King, but we will own His righteousness as ours, and we will embrace Him as our righteous King, and put no confidence in our own supposed good works.

But it is in Jeremiah 31, where those promises referred to were made to God's people. There, God revealed to Jeremiah His glorious "New Covenant," which would replace the Old Covenant, which His people had constantly broken.

God promises, in His New Covenant, that He will change the hearts and minds of His people, to know the Lord, and to know and love His law.

No longer will the promises be based upon our obedience to the law. Rather, our obedience will be the work of the Holy Spirit's power in us, whereby we will "know the LORD."

But the highest part of the New Covenant is this: God Himself promises to have mercy on our unrighteousness, and to remember our sins against us no more!

God's good promises to His people, which the Righteous Branch will carry out, will be the unilateral forgiveness by God of our crimes against Him!

But the wicked king had destroyed these precious Gospel words of God as well.

Consider how the loss of these precious texts at the hand of the wicked king would hobble us today in our knowledge of the Gospel!

It would leave us with the impression that the imputed righteousness of Christ was a novel invention of the Apostle Paul, rather than an ancient and precious promise of God.

It would leave us in ignorance of the New Covenant, and therefore how Christ's blood executes that covenant.

The whole basis for the beautiful argument for the Gospel in Hebrews would be torn out. Without the New Covenant promises, where is the need for a "better priest," and for what is Christ our surety?

Without those precious promises of sanctification and forgiveness of sin, what is Christ's sacrifice meant to secure for us?

There would be no "better promises" of a "better covenant," and there would be no New Covenant to do away with the faulty Old Covenant!

Would we be left with the Mosaic covenant of "obey and live, disobey and die?"

Even the Lord's Supper itself would lose much of its meaning, with Christ's Own words either mangled or completely misunderstood by us.

The promise of the New Covenant, that God would unilaterally forgive the sins of His people, would be unknown to the disciples when Jesus went to die for us.

We would be left with no basis to rejoice when we discovered, that God had promised to forgive our sins Himself and we never understood how, but now Jesus tells us that His blood shedding at Calvary executes that New Covenant promise.

Without the New Covenant texts that the wicked king destroyed, we could never enjoy the glorious announcement, that it is God's Lamb slain for us that makes it all possible.

That filthy, wicked king Jehoiakim had destroyed crucial texts of God's Word, upon which so much of our understanding of the Gospel of our salvation depends!

But praise God, He did not permit His Word to be destroyed forever!

God ordered Jeremiah and Baruch to write the prophecies again on a new scroll, and they obeyed His commandment. That which we so desperately need, God provided again for us.

There was, to be sure, great wrath pronounced against the wicked king. God promised his ignominious destruction at the hands of the Babylonians.

More than that, God pronounced that the king's line would be cut off from ever sitting upon the throne of David. This is why Mary's husband Joseph could never be the physical father of Messiah, because he was of the lineage of Jehoiakim, and came under God's ban.

This ban is poignant, because the king had destroyed the record of God's promise that one day, the Righteous Branch would arise from David, and save His people, and become their righteousness, when they could never obey the commandments themselves.

Because the king destroyed God's Word in his rebellion, God excluded the king from ever participating in the line of that promised Righteous Branch. The king in his wickedness had played his part in bringing judgment against Israel for its sin, so neither he nor his line would ever again rule to bring salvation and obedience to the people.

It is as if God said, "You repudiate my judgments, you try to destroy my Word -- therefore, you will never have a part in my promised salvation, which I will still declare by my faithful prophet Jeremiah."

No doubt all of this was much in the mind of Jesus when He wept over Jerusalem, and pronounced judgment on the rulers in His day, who rejected His Gospel in their disobedience. "Your house is left unto you desolate. You will not see Me henceforth, until you shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord."

In this incident with the wicked king, who tried to destroy God's Word by burning Jeremiah's book of God's prophecies, we see just one historical example of how God miraculously preserved His Word down to us today, and how much we profit from it.

Praise God, we have Christ's promise to be our righteousness!

Praise God, we have God's covenant to forgive our sins, and have mercy upon our unrighteousness!