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## *Called to Speak for the Lord – the Book of Jeremiah*

The Insanity of Sin

*May 30, 2021*

**Sermon Text:** Jeremiah 34-35

**Scripture Reading:** Romans 1:16-32

Rom 1:32 Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

Sin loves company. In fact, it demands company. You've heard its slogan – "see you in hell." And so the wicked will see hell. Whether they will have company there is doubtful – hell is most likely a solo destination.

I want to talk to you this morning about what we can call the *insanity* of sin. You see it here in that last verse of Romans 1 – knowing that their evil

demands God's wrath upon them, nevertheless they continue in their wickedness and heartily encourage others to join in. They reward those who do so with their "approval." This is why popularity with the world is a dangerous sign. This is what we often call "peer pressure." The offer of approval, acceptance – an unholy comradeship – by which many are snared.

Pro 1:10 My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent. (11) If they say, "Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood; let us ambush the innocent without reason; (12) like Sheol let us swallow them alive, and whole, like those who go down to the pit; (13) we shall find all precious goods, we shall fill our houses with plunder; (14) throw in your lot among us; we will all have one purse"—

(15) my son, do not walk in the way with them; hold back your foot from their paths, (16) for their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed blood. (17) For in vain is a net spread in the sight of any bird, (18) but these men

lie in wait for their own blood; they set an ambush for their own lives. (19) Such are the ways of everyone who is greedy for unjust gain; it takes away the life of its possessors.

Those who travel on Broadway to their eternal destruction in hell enjoy much company. It is a wide road – while the narrow way to life is typically a lonely enterprise.

We come this morning to chapters 34 and 35 of Jeremiah. The armies of Babylon have done their ancient version of the “blitzkrieg” so that only Jerusalem and a very few other cities of Judah remain. Now Jerusalem is surrounded. And Jeremiah has the Lord’s Word to its inhabitants. Follow along as I read:

Jer 34:1-22 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army and all the kingdoms of the earth under his dominion and all the peoples were fighting against Jerusalem and all of its cities: (2) “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Go and speak to Zedekiah king of Judah and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD: Behold, I am giving this city into the hand of the

king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire. (3) You shall not escape from his hand but shall surely be captured and delivered into his hand. You shall see the king of Babylon eye to eye and speak with him face to face. And you shall go to Babylon.’

(4) Yet hear the word of the LORD, O Zedekiah king of Judah! Thus says the LORD concerning you: ‘You shall not die by the sword. (5) You shall die in peace. And as spices were burned for your fathers, the former kings who were before you, so people shall burn spices for you and lament for you, saying, “Alas, lord!”’ For I have spoken the word, declares the LORD.”

(6) Then Jeremiah the prophet spoke all these words to Zedekiah king of Judah, in Jerusalem, (7) when the army of the king of Babylon was fighting against Jerusalem and against all the cities of Judah that were left, Lachish and Azekah, for these were the only fortified cities of Judah that remained.

(8) The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, after King Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people in Jerusalem to make a proclamation of liberty to them, (9) that everyone should set free his Hebrew slaves, male

and female, so that no one should enslave a Jew, his brother. (10) And they obeyed, all the officials and all the people who had entered into the covenant that everyone would set free his slave, male or female, so that they would not be enslaved again. They obeyed and set them free.

(11) **But afterward they turned around and took back the male and female slaves they had set free, and brought them into subjection as slaves.**

(12) The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah from the LORD: (13) “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I myself made a covenant with your fathers when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, saying, (14) ‘At the end of seven years each of you must set free the fellow Hebrew who has been sold to you and has served you six years; you must set him free from your service.’ But your fathers did not listen to me or incline their ears to me.

(15) **You recently repented** and did what was right in my eyes by proclaiming liberty, each to his neighbor, and you made a covenant before me in the house that is called by

my name, (16) **but then you turned around and profaned my name when each of you took back his male and female slaves, whom you had set free according to their desire, and you brought them into subjection to be your slaves.**

(17) “Therefore, thus says the LORD: You have not obeyed me by proclaiming liberty, every one to his brother and to his neighbor; behold, I proclaim to you liberty to the sword, to pestilence, and to famine, declares the LORD. I will make you a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth. (18) And the men who transgressed my covenant and did not keep the terms of the covenant that they made before me, I will make them like the calf that they cut in two and passed between its parts— (19) the officials of Judah, the officials of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, the priests, and all the people of the land who passed between the parts of the calf. (20) And I will give them into the hand of their enemies and into the hand of those who seek their lives. Their dead bodies shall be food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth.

(21) And Zedekiah king of Judah and his officials I will give into the hand of their enemies and into the hand of those

who seek their lives, into the hand of the army of the king of Babylon which has withdrawn from you. (22) Behold, I will command, declares the LORD, and will bring them back to this city. And they will fight against it and take it and burn it with fire. I will make the cities of Judah a desolation without inhabitant.”

The insanity of sin, you see. Under the pressure of the Babylonian invasions, and in response to Jeremiah’s preaching, the king had ordered a kind of “revival.” One particular sin that was pervasive among the Jews was their enslavement of fellow Hebrews. This was plain, rebellious, disobedience to God’s Word and they knew it.

Now, to his credit, King Zedekiah realized that spiritual reform was required. That God’s wrath was upon the nation for their evil and in particular this business of enslaving their fellow Jews and then refusing to set them free in the 7<sup>th</sup> year:

Deu 15:12-15 “If your brother, a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you, he shall serve you six years, and in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you. (13) And when you

let him go free from you, you shall not let him go empty-handed. (14) You shall furnish him liberally out of your flock, out of your threshing floor, and out of your winepress. As the LORD your God has blessed you, you shall give to him. (15) You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this today.

Think of the setting once again. The city is under siege. Nation after nation, city after city, had fallen to Babylon. Now Nebuchadnezzar is at their own door. The people go along with Zedekiah’s decree and it would appear that repentance had taken place. But then:

**(15) You recently repented and did what was right in my eyes by proclaiming liberty, each to his neighbor, and you made a covenant before me in the house that is called by my name, (16) but then you turned around and profaned my name when each of you took back his male and female slaves, whom you had set free according to their desire, and you brought them into subjection to be your slaves.**

The insanity of sin. This is impossible to wrap our minds around. And yet we see it all around us in our day, do we not? People get into some kind of “scrape” or trying circumstance – an illness, a disaster, maybe a literal invasion of their nation by an enemy, so they “repent” of their sin. Make all kinds of promises to God. But then –

Pro 26:11 Like a dog that returns to his vomit is a fool who repeats his folly.

And so their last sin is worse than the first. What were they thinking? That some brief, token of obedience for the moment would appease God?

Listen to Matthew Henry on this:

When there was some hope that the siege was raised and the danger over **they repented of their repentance**, undid the good they had done, and forced the servants they had released into their respective services again. 1. The *king of Babylon's army* had now *gone up from them*, [Jer 34:21](#). Pharaoh was bringing an army of Egyptians to oppose the progress of the king of Babylon's victories, upon the tidings of which the Chaldeans raised the siege for a time, as we find, [Jer 37:5](#). *They*

*departed from Jerusalem.*

See how ready God was to put a stop to his judgments, upon the first instance of reformation, so slow is he to anger and so swift to show mercy. As soon as ever they let their servants go free God let them go free.

2. When they began to think themselves safe from the besiegers they made their servants come back into subjection to them, [Jer 34:11](#), and again [Jer 34:16](#). This was a great abuse to their servants, to whom servitude would be more irksome, after they had had some taste of the pleasures of liberty. It was a great shame to themselves that they could not keep in a good mind when they were in it.

But it was especially an affront to God; in doing this they *polluted his name*, [Jer 34:16](#). It was a contempt of the command he had given them, as if that were of no force at all, but they might either keep it or break it as they thought fit. It was a contempt of the covenant they had made with him, and of that wrath which they had imprecated upon themselves in case they should break that covenant.

**It was jesting with God almighty, as if he could be imposed upon by fallacious promises**, which, when they

had gained their point, they would look upon themselves no longer obliged by. it was *lying to God with their mouths* and *flattering him with their tongues*. It was likewise a contempt of the judgments of God and setting them at defiance; as if, when once the course of them was stopped a little and interrupted, they would never proceed again and the judgment would never be revived; **whereas reprieves are so far from being pardons that if they be abused thus, and sinners take encouragement from them to return to sin, they are but preparatives for heavier strokes of divine vengeance.**

III. For this treacherous dealing with God they are here severely threatened. *Be not deceived; God is not mocked.* Those that think to put a cheat upon God by a dissembled [ie, a false appearance, a concealing of one's real intentions] repentance, a fallacious covenant, and a partial temporary reformation, will prove in the end to have put the greatest cheat upon their own souls; for *the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.*

The insanity of sin, you see. Thinking that God can be mocked, fooled, that we can put one over on Him and hide our motives from Him who:

1Ch 28:9 "... know the God of your father and serve him with a whole heart and with a willing mind, for the LORD searches all hearts and understands every plan and thought. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will cast you off forever.

But the craziness of their sin is not over even yet. Follow along now as I read the next chapter where we find in that dark era of history, that God always preserves His remnant. Meet the Rechabites – a people who no doubt had long been considered oddballs, weird, and despised by the crowd:

Jer 35:1-19 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah:

(2) "Go to the house of the Rechabites and speak with them and bring them to the house of the LORD, into one of the chambers; then offer them wine to drink."

(3) So I took Jaazaniah the son of Jeremiah, son of Habazziniah and his brothers and all his sons and the whole house of the Rechabites. (4) I brought

them to the house of the LORD into the chamber of the sons of Hanan the son of Igdaliah, the man of God, which was near the chamber of the officials, above the chamber of Maaseiah the son of Shallum, keeper of the threshold.

(5) Then I set before the Rechabites pitchers full of wine, and cups, and I said to them, “Drink wine.” (6) But they answered, “We will drink no wine, for Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, commanded us, ‘You shall not drink wine, neither you nor your sons forever.

(7) You shall not build a house; you shall not sow seed; you shall not plant or have a vineyard; **but you shall live in tents all your days**, that you may live many days in the land where you sojourn.’

(8) We have obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, in all that he commanded us, to drink no wine all our days, ourselves, our wives, our sons, or our daughters, (9) and not to build houses to dwell in. We have no vineyard or field or seed, (10) but we have lived in tents and have obeyed and done all that Jonadab our father commanded us. (11) But when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came

up against the land, we said, ‘Come, and let us go to Jerusalem for fear of the army of the Chaldeans and the army of the Syrians.’ So we are living in Jerusalem.”

(12) Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: (13) “Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Go and say to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, **Will you not receive instruction and listen to my words? declares the LORD.** (14) The command that Jonadab the son of Rechab gave to his sons, to drink no wine, has been kept, and they drink none to this day, for they have obeyed their father's command. **I have spoken to you persistently, but you have not listened to me.** (15) I have sent to you all my servants the prophets, sending them persistently, saying, ‘Turn now every one of you from his evil way, and amend your deeds, and do not go after other gods to serve them, and then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to you and your fathers.’ But you did not incline your ear or listen to me. (16) **The sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have kept the command that their father gave them, but this people has not obeyed me.**

(17) Therefore, thus says the LORD,

the God of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I am bringing upon Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the disaster that I have pronounced against them, because I have spoken to them and they have not listened, I have called to them and they have not answered.” (18) But to the house of the Rechabites Jeremiah said, “Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Because you have obeyed the command of Jonadab your father and kept all his precepts and done all that he commanded you, (19) therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Jonadab the son of Rechab shall never lack a man to stand before me.”

What then is this business – these Rechabites? Was their father some kind of nut case, a survivalist living off the grid? Were they arrogant, using their atypical lifestyle to boast to others about their “holiness”? No.

In fact, what we see here is genuine faith. Let me show you:

1. In regard to not drinking wine – this was one of the marks of a *nazirite*. They would not even touch a grape skin.

Num 6:1-4 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, (2) “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When either a man or a woman makes a special vow, the vow of a Nazirite, to separate himself to the LORD, (3) he shall separate himself from wine and strong drink. He shall drink no vinegar made from wine or strong drink and shall not drink any juice of grapes or eat grapes, fresh or dried. (4) All the days of his separation he shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, not even the seeds or the skins.

I don’t understand completely what the nazirite vow was all about, but it was essentially a vow to be separated and holy to the Lord. And this is plainly what we see in the Rechabites. They were serious about following the Lord.

Now, there is a second important quality of these Rechabites here:

You shall not build a house; you shall not sow seed; you shall not plant or have a vineyard; **but you shall live in tents all your days**, that you may live many days in the land where you sojourn.’

Where else have we seen this thing about living in tents rather than building a house? Here it is:

Heb 11:8-10 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. (9) By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. (10) For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

In other words, the Rechabites were *people of faith. The faith of Abraham.* They knew, as did Abraham, that the present earthly land of Canaan *was not the fulfillment of the Lord's promise to Abraham.* They too were “looking forward to the city that has foundations...” – that is to say, the New Heavens and Earth.

So the Rechabites obeyed the Lord. They separated themselves from the nation that was supposed to be holy, but wasn't. They walked by faith, and in the end the Lord rewarded and preserved them.

In contrast, almost the entire rest of the nation refused to listen to the Lord. The Rechabites heard and believed their father, but when God Himself spoke to the rest of the Jews, they refused to hear Him or obey Him.

This is the insanity of sin. It gains the approval of the crowd, but it ends in hell.

Here then is the irony of it all. Insane people, people who have lost their minds in sin, are considered “normal” in this present world. And those, like the Rechabites, who walk by faith, are considered abnormal, oddballs, people to be mocked.

And so this all brings us to a question, does it not? *Which kind are we? Are we popular with the world, craving its approval and walking in step with insanity to hell? Or are we Rechabites?*

Luk 6:26 “Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.

Jas 4:4 You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

2Pe 2:19 They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.

1Jn 4:5-6 They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. (6) We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

Jer 5:30-31 An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: (31) the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule at their direction; my people love to have it so, but what will you do when the end comes?

Yes, what will the sin-insane people do when the end comes? Too late. It will be too late.