**BCM Bible Study - November 9/10, 2022, [Jer 34-39]**

**The Failure of Judah’s Leaders and the Fall of Jerusalem**

**Background**: In chapters 34 – 39, there is a lot going on. The chapters don’t happen chronologically, but are specifically organized in a way to communicate a specific story about the fall of Jerusalem. Chapter 34 begins with a prophecy to Zedekiah about the fall of Jerusalem and his own fate. Then, in the middle of the narrative of the fall of Jerusalem, Jeremiah interjects two things that happened in the past that communicate Judah’s disobedience and the failure of the leaders to save their people through repentance. Chapters 37-39 then describe the specific events that happened in the actual fall of Jerusalem on the day that Babylon stood in the courts and took over.

**Read Jeremiah 34:8-22 [Zedekiah and the slaves]**

* What did Zedekiah covenant with the people of Judah in v. 8-9? Then, what happens to this decree in v. 10-11?
* What is God’s response to the actions of the Judeans?

*Note: There are a few speculations as to why Zedekiah declared that Judeans set their slaves free – but there were likely several motives in place. For one, the freed slaves were more likely to be able to fight the Babylonians alongside of the people of Judah, and two, it was a possible act of repentance, or a last-ditch effort from the people of Judah to get God to spare them from the attack of the Babylonians. However, at this point in the Babylonian attack, Egypt has advanced toward Jerusalem which caused a break in the siege from Babylon and the people of Judah thought they might be safe and reclaimed their slaves.*

* In a place of desperation, have you ever promised God that you would do ‘x’ in order to be freed from the evil or suffering at hand? What was the result?
* What is the problem with making promises to God in the midst of desperation? Is there really repentance at play here – why or why not?
* How can we be sure that we’re really in a place of repentance, and not just suffering the consequences of sin and making future empty promises?

**Read Jeremiah 35: 1-2, 5-10, 12-17 [Jeremiah and the Rekabites]**

* What is the contrast that God is making through the actions that God instructs Jeremiah to carry out in v. 5-10?
* What is suggested by the way that the Rekabites could be so devout and yet still disobedient to the Lord?
* Where might you be following your ancestors or traditions more passionately than you are following the Lord and His Word?
	+ Why is this something that can occur so frequently for us? How can we keep this in check and discern ways of making our following of God’s Word better?

**Jeremiah 36: [A Disregard for the Word of God]**

*This is an earlier episode that Jeremiah put in this section. He’s recounting a time when the Lord asked him to write prophecy on a scroll in the reign of Jehoiakim. Then he read it out loud in the temples for the people of Jerusalem to hear during a time of declared fasting and (hopefully) seeking the Lord. Baruch does this at Jeremiah’s commands and catches the attention of Jehoiakim’s attendants, who eventually bring it to read to him. Keep in mind, the scroll contains the prophecy of destruction of Israel and the command to repent.*

**Read 36: 20-32**

* What is the king’s response to hearing the word of God (v.23)?
* What do you think the king is communicating through the burning of the scroll?
* What are some ways that you’ve seen God’s word responded to in the world today (either positively or negatively)?
* Have you ever attempted to “burn” God’s word in your own life (i.e. blatantly ignore it or disregard it)? What was the result?

“The paradox of Jeremiah 36 is a people at worship who do not hear and who, therefore, do not respond to the word of instruction and change that God provides them.” (Dearman)

* How should God’s Word be treated? What should our response to the Word look like?

**Jeremiah** **37-39: The Fall of Jerusalem [Zedekiah Case study]**

*When the Babylonians withdraw from Jerusalem to engage the Egyptian army (588 BC), Jeremiah warns King Zedekiah that Babylon will return to destroy Jerusalem (37:1-10). During this reprieve Jeremiah leaves Jerusalem for his hometown but is arrested as a deserter (37:11-21). He is thrown into a cistern (large hole in the ground with no escape) and left to die (38:1-6), but Ebed-melech (whose name means “servant of the king”) rescues him and moves him to the court of the guard (38:7-13). Despite a final warning from Jeremiah (38:14-28), Jerusalem is destroyed and King Zedekiah is captured (39:1-10). Jeremiah is vindicated and given the choice of either going into exile or remaining in the land (39:11-18). – Matthew Harmon*

**Read 37:3-10, 16-17, and 38:14-28**

* What actions, characteristics and behaviors do you see from Zedekiah and his interactions with Jeremiah?
* What excuse does Zedekiah give Jeremiah when Jeremiah tells him to surrender?
* “Disciples of Jesus cannot blatantly disregard his Word and then assume that a prayer for deliverance is efficacious; correspondingly, Zedekiah cannot assume that his rejections of God’s Word will somehow induce God to send a different word of instruction.” (Dearman)
* Which do you think is worse: having the word of God brought to you and burning it, or seeking it out and making excuses of why not to follow it? Why is that?

**Conclusion:**

**Read Matthew 11:15 & 13:13.** Jesus at multiple points speaks about those who are able to hear or see, and a similar thing is witnessed in the book of Jeremiah. How does that offer you comfort in bringing glory to God today? What does that continue to say about our dependence on God?