



THE ANSWER TO JUDGMENT

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 Jeremiah 13:1-27
 13th Message
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We return this morning to the pages of Jeremiah, the weeping prophet. Rembrandt in one of his masterpieces depicted Jeremiah as a forlorn, lamenting figure, with a collapsing Jerusalem in the background. Jeremiah spent his entire life speaking God's word to a corrupt and idolatrous society. His was a lone voice standing against all the other voices of the day. Loneliness and heartache, perpetual pain and incurable wounds were his lot in life. In the end, his forty years of faithful service failed to save Judah from the judgment that God had promised through his spokesman.

While the images and metaphors of the book of Jeremiah picture idolatry, sin and judgment, they also picture repentance and salvation. Much of the book is bad news. It's enough to make us squirm in our seats. We don't think we need to hear this kind of thing, but this is exactly what we need at times. We must preach the whole counsel of God's word, not just our favorite passages. God will expose the idols of our lives because he wants us to eliminate them. He wants us to have hearts that are pure, hearts that worship him alone. That is why the prophecy of Jeremiah is so important. The visual effects that are drawn in these pages of Scripture penetrate the most hardened heart.

Today we come to chapter 13 of this prophecy. This is a poetry and prose passage in which we find five pictures of judgment. After we have looked at these pictures, we will study five answers to them, from the New Testament. Jeremiah 13:

Thus the LORD said to me, "Go and buy yourself a linen waistband and put it around your waist, but do not put it in water." So I bought the waistband in accordance with the word of the LORD and put it around my waist. Then the word of the LORD came to me a second time, saying, "Take the waistband that you have bought, which is around your waist, and arise, go to the Euphrates and hide it there in a crevice of the rock." So I went and hid it by the Euphrates, as the LORD had commanded me. After many days the LORD said to me, "Arise, go to the Euphrates and take from there the waistband which I commanded you to hide there." Then I went to the Euphrates and dug, and I took the waistband from the place where I had hidden it; and lo, the waistband was ruined, it was totally worthless.

Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Thus says the LORD, 'Just so will I destroy the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem. 'This wicked people, who refuse to listen to My words, who walk in the stubbornness of their hearts and have gone after other gods to serve them and to bow down to them, let them be just like this waistband which is totally worthless. For as the waistband clings to the waist of a man, so I made the whole household of Israel and the whole

household of Judah cling to Me,' declares the LORD, that they might be for Me a people, for renown, for praise and for glory; but they did not listen.' (Jer 13:1-11, NASB)

The first eleven verses are given in the form of a parable. We actually studied this text last October, so we won't spend much time in it. Jeremiah is commanded by the Lord to purchase a waistband, an intimate piece of apparel worn close to the body, like a thigh-length undershirt; then he was to go the Euphrates and hide the waistband in the crevice of the rock. After some time had elapsed, he was commanded to retrieve the waistcloth. When he did so, he discovered that it was ruined and utterly worthless.

The waistband symbolized Judah and her relationship to God. The people of Judah were supposed to cling to God in the same way that a waistband clings to one's waist. However, they were hiding from God. They were pursuing worthless idols, walking after emptiness and becoming empty as a result. They were seeking living water from broken cisterns. In these verses God is giving them a warning through a visual image of the ruined waistcloth. Judah's relationship with God was all fouled up. Her garments were ruined. God's plan for them to be for him a people for renown, for praise and glory, was in tatters.

We are subject to judgment when we disregard our primary relationship with God and let it spoil. Judgment means that we can no longer be the people we were intended to be. No longer are we able to do the things for which we were designed. Have you wept over lost years, the missed opportunities while you were pursuing things that ruined your life, developing patterns of destructive behavior and refusing to submit to God and his ways? We pursue success, striving for the things that we think will make us happy. But walking after emptiness only makes us empty. Our dreams and fantasies wither and die. That is the result of judgment.

The second picture of judgment speaks of wine and drunkenness.

"Therefore you are to speak this word to them, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, "Every jug is to be filled with wine.'" And when they say to you, 'Do we not very well know that every jug is to be filled with wine?' then say to them, 'Thus says the LORD, "Behold I am about to fill all the inhabitants of this land—the kings that sit for David on his throne, the priests, the prophets and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem—with drunkenness! "I will dash them against each other, both the fathers and the sons together," declares the LORD. "I will not show pity nor be sorry nor have compassion so as not to destroy them.'" (Jer 13:12-14)

This picture is found in several places in Jeremiah. In chapter 25, God calls it the "cup of wrath." He instructs

Jeremiah to "Take this cup of the wine of wrath from My hand, and cause all the nations to whom I send you to drink it. They will drink and stagger and go mad because of the sword that I will send among them." (25:15-16). The prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel also make mention of this cup of God's wrath.

The wine jar referred to here was a large earthenware container. These jars were to be filled with wine, but God adds an ironic twist: the inhabitants of Judah would be filled not with wine, but with drunkenness. The kings, priests and prophets and all the people would become drunk.

Drunkenness clouds judgment and inhibits mobility. It brings on loss of control, instability, dizziness, irrational strife, nausea and helplessness. Drunkards are subject to derision. The image being portrayed here is that in the coming time of crisis, the inhabitants of Judah, brothers, fathers and sons, will be so unstable that they will bump into and shatter one another. But God will not show pity or compassion. He will not spare them. He will make them drink and their drunkenness will result in destruction. Judah will be "destroyed" (the same word used in verses 7-8 for the waistband).

This picture of drunkenness is a metaphor that describes the results of God's wrath. Indulging may start off with enjoyment and fun, but it always ends in misery and pain. Drunken people do stupid and foolish things. They wake up promising themselves they will never get drunk again. We warn our college students that alcohol can result in sickness, even death. Drunkenness is an apt metaphor for judgment. To be drunk is to be controlled by spirits — and I don't mean the Holy Spirit. A life of drunkenness is a life of false joy, numbness and escape.

The third picture portrays light and darkness.

**Listen and give heed, do not be haughty,
For the LORD has spoken.
Give glory to the LORD your God,
Before He brings darkness
And before your feet stumble
On the dusky mountains,
And while you are hoping for light
He makes it into deep darkness,
And turns it into gloom.
But if you will not listen to it,
My soul will sob in secret for *such* pride;
And my eyes will bitterly weep
And flow down with tears,
Because the flock of the LORD has been taken captive.**
(Jer 13:15-17)

The emphasis here is obvious in the four words, darkness, dusk, deep darkness, and gloom. The figure of dusky mountains can refer to either twilight or dawn. These can be comforting times, times to commune with God. But the picture here is that of travelers on a mountain path who are overtaken by the gathering gloom before they reach their destination. When darkness suddenly descends, even the bravest can have anxiety pains.

"Deep darkness" refers to overwhelming darkness or grief. "Gloom" speaks of heavy clouds or thick darkness. The increasing darkness is a metaphor for the judgment coming upon Judah for her pride and haughtiness. The exhortation is that the light is fading, but there is still hope if

Judah will listen to God. Exalting God and giving him glory will dispel the darkness. Notice the agony of the poet. If Judah does not listen, Jeremiah will be overcome with grief. His soul will sob in secret. His eyes will weep over the sin of God's people. At times we don't even weep over our own sin, let alone someone else's.

The farther we wander from God the darker it gets. In the end we find ourselves on a mountain ledge, engulfed in blackness. Gloom and despair spread like a fog into our hearts and souls. Light symbolizes hope, truth, warmth and safety, but darkness symbolizes despair, lies, coldness and fear. Judgment is being out in the cold all by ourselves, unable to find our way. That is what sin does to us. I am reminded of the words of the apostle John: "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). A popular sixties song began with the phrase, "Hello darkness, my old friend."

The fourth picture is given in a royal lament.

**Say to the king and the queen mother,
"Take a lowly seat,
For your beautiful crown
Has come down from your head."
The cities of the Negev have been locked up,
And there is no one to open them;
All Judah has been carried into exile,
Wholly carried into exile.** (Jer 13:18-19)

The king here is Jehoiachin. He is mentioned several times elsewhere in conjunction with the queen mother Ne-hushta. Her position was very influential in Israel, especially during the reign of this young king Jehoiachin, who was only 18. This reveals that this text deals with the year 597 B.C., the year when these two, king and queen mother, were banished into exile, when the first group of Jews were taken to Babylon.

Jehoiachin and his mother are commanded to take a low seat because their beautiful crown had been removed. They were used to privileged treatment, but now they would become exiles, perhaps even slaves. They might seek refuge, but Jeremiah warns that all the cities of the Negev, the area to the south of Jerusalem, were barricaded so that fleeing fugitives would not be able to find a place to hide. The "coming down of the crown," in verse 18, is contrasted with the tears that flow down Jeremiah's cheeks, in verse 17.

The psalmist says that God created man a little lower than the angels. His intent was that man fill the earth, that he would subdue it and rule over God's creation. Men and women were designed to be kings and queens, but the fall ruined all that. Self-exaltation and self-rule corrupted God's plan, and so man was humbled.

Dethroned kingship is a metaphor for judgment. God opposes the proud: those who exalt themselves will be brought low. No one is exempt, no one is too exalted, no one is ever safe from the Lord's hand of judgment and discipline. The expression, "the bigger they are the harder they fall," is apt.

Are you building your life without God? Are you exalting yourself? If God hasn't humbled you yet, he will. That is God's judgment.

The final picture is a lament over the disgrace to come

upon Jerusalem.

**"Lift up your eyes and see
Those coming from the north.
Where is the flock that was given you,
Your beautiful sheep?
"What will you say when He appoints over you—
And you yourself had taught them—
Former companions to be head over you?
Will not pangs take hold of you
Like a woman in childbirth?
"If you say in your heart,
'Why have these things happened to me?'
Because of the magnitude of your iniquity
Your skirts have been removed
And your heels have been exposed.
"Can the Ethiopian change his skin
Or the leopard his spots?
Then you also can do good
Who are accustomed to doing evil.
"Therefore I will scatter them like drifting straw
To the desert wind.
"This is your lot, the portion measured to you
From Me," declares the LORD,
"Because you have forgotten Me
And trusted in falsehood.
"So I Myself have also stripped your skirts off
over your face,
That your shame may be seen.
"As for your adulteries and your *lustful* neighings,
The lewdness of your prostitution
On the hills in the field,
I have seen your abominations.
Woe to you, O Jerusalem!
How long will you remain unclean?" (Jer 13:20-27)**

The text is recorded in the form of a rough a,b,c,d-a,b,c,d pattern. Twice Jeremiah addresses judgment, the reasons behind it and the humiliation of being exposed. Then, finally, we have his question regarding the possibility of change.

The judgment will come by the hands of the Babylonians, the very people whom Judah courted as companions. And it will be painful, like the pains of labor. Babylon will scatter the sheep like "straw in the wind," a reference to exile. Psalm 1:4 says, "The wicked are not so, but they are like chaff which the wind drives away."

The people ask, "Why have these things happened to me?" (verse 22). It was because in the magnitude of their iniquity they had forgotten God and resorted to falsehood. Therefore, Judah will be exposed publicly as a harlot. The judgment will be shameful, even disgraceful.

But perhaps the most penetrating word comes in the Lord's question regarding change: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin. Or the leopard his spots? *Then* you also can do good who are accustomed to doing evil" (verse 23). There is no possibility of change. Judah can no more change its evil ways than the Ethiopian can change the color of his skin or the leopard his spots.

Perhaps the most difficult thing about being under God's judgment is the fact that we feel helpless to change. We are absolutely powerless to help ourselves. Once evil and idolatry have taken root and grown in our lives we cannot but help to follow the course we have set. Like

the leopard, we cannot change our spots.

All of this sounds rather depressing, doesn't it? But, in reality, every person in this room deserves judgment. All of us begin life as sinners. We sin because we are sinners through and through. And the wages of sin is death. All of us have to some degree felt this experience of death as a consequences of our sin.

We are in desperate need of an antidote to the wrath of God. Is there any solution to this dreadful situation? As I reflected on this text I realized that every picture of judgment in this chapter is answered and reversed in Christ. God reached down to us and provided the answer in Christ.

A. The answer to soiled, worthless garments is robes of righteousness in Christ.

For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ (Gal 3:27)

**I will rejoice greatly in the LORD,
My soul will exult in my God;
For He has clothed me with garments of salvation,
He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness,
As a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels (Isa 61:10).**

"He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels" (Rev 3:5).

Like the waistband of the text, we are stained, soiled and ruined. Sin has made us worthless. But in Christ we receive new, clean robes. When the prodigal returned home, his father clothed him in a new robe. In the same way, the Father clothes us in new robes in Christ.

B. The answer to the cup of God's wrath is the cup of the new covenant offered through Christ.

And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood" (Luke 22:20).

Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? (1 Cor 10:16)

No longer do we have to dread the cup of God's wrath. We can drink the cup of blessing, the cup of Christ, the cup of life, the cup of the new covenant. On the cross, Jesus drank that cup dry so that we would not be filled with drunkenness and have to face destruction. Now we can drink continually from the cup of Christ and never get drunk.

C. The answer to impenetrable darkness and gloom is the light of Christ.

Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life" (John 8:12).

"I have come as Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness" (John 12:46).

The dawn has come in the person of Christ. We don't have to live in darkness, with our deceptions and lies, shame

and guilt. We don't have to live under the cloud of gloom. We are now in the light of Christ and we can walk in that light.

D. The answer to having our crowns removed and our being deposed into exile is reigning with Christ.

Unlike the king and queen mother, we are not deposed. Rather, Paul says that God has

raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:6).

God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble. God raises and exalts those who are humble enough to bow before Jesus. In Christ we regain our kingship and wear a crown of life.

E. The answer to our inability to change our wicked and evil ways is becoming new creations in Christ, transformed by the Spirit.

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come (2 Cor 5:17).

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit (2 Cor 3:18).

As Christians we don't have to go on believing that we are unable to change. We may not be able to change ourselves, but the beauty of the new covenant is that God writes his law on our hearts. We change from the inside out, not the outside in. We are new creations in Christ.

Eugene O'Neill said, "Man is born broken. He lives by mending. The grace of God is glue." Christ is the complete answer to God's judgment. Salvation in Christ is a wondrous thing. We recognize what should be in store for us, and then find ourselves delivered, even exalted to the throne of God. In the midst of all the bad news, God's word proclaims good news. And the badness of the bad news makes the goodness of the good news all the sweeter. This is why we worship. This is why our hearts sing with unending praise to the Lord. Life is not about getting a bigger house or a better job. Life is about being saved from the darkness of hell and living in the light of Christ.

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