

# The Way of Life & Death • Jeremiah 21:8-10

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. *Fork In The Road*

1. It seems there's no end to the people who are willing to offer you advice on how to live
2. Most everyone has an opinion and they're ready to share it with you if you'll give them half a minute
3. Advice is the only commodity on the market where the supply always exceeds the demand.
4. *Some* of the wisdom people part with is truly enlightening; such as . . .
  - a. If at first you don't succeed, sky-diving is not for you.
  - b. Money can't buy happiness. But it sure makes misery easier to live with.
  - c. It may be that your sole purpose in life is simply to serve as a warning to others.
  - d. Remember: You can't fall off the floor.
  - e. The average woman would rather have beauty than brains, because the average man can see better than he can think.
  - f. Eagles may soar, but weasels aren't sucked into jet engines.
  - g. If at first you don't succeed, destroy all evidence that you tried.
  - h. Save our planet; it's the only one with chocolate!

### B. *A Fork In The Road*

1. Grandpa, a man known for his sage advice was talking with his grandson, Jimmy
  - a. the old man picked up the youngster, put him on his knee and said,
  - b. "Jimmy, I'm going to share a slice of wisdom with you that will help you the rest of your life, so listen up.
  - c. "When you're headed down the road of life and you come to a fork in the road – take it!"
2. In Jeremiah 21, the prophet puts a fork in the road of the people of Judah and tells them to make up their mind on which path they will take

## II. TEXT

### A. *Vs. 8-10*

<sup>8</sup> **"Now you shall say to this people, 'Thus says the LORD: "Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death.**

1. Let me set the scene of what is happening at this time in Jeremiah's life
2. It's the year 588 BC and the mighty Babylonian army is camped around the walls of Jerusalem.
3. Judah's king Zedekiah had rebelled against the Babylonians who had already conquered the nation and installed him as their puppet governor over the region

4. But Zedekiah decided to rebel and withhold the annual tribute he was supposed to pay
5. So the Babylonian king had sent his army to recapture the capital of Jerusalem which Zedekiah had shut up tight against him
6. The Babylonians arrived and laid siege to the city
  - a. no matter where you went on the walls of Jerusalem, North, south, east or west, you saw the tents of the Babylonians and their sentries keeping watch over the city, making sure no one got in or out
  - b. it was a long waiting game - who would give in first?
  - c. would the Jews in the city starve and so open the gates?
  - d. or would the Babylonians get tired, give up and leave?
7. While they played this waiting game, Zedekiah sent a couple of his officials to Jeremiah and asked him to give a word of counsel from the Lord
8. Really, what Zedekiah was hoping for was a promise from God that some ally of the Jews, like the Egyptians, would hear of the siege and come rescue them
9. But Jeremiah's message is anything but encouraging.
10. Zedekiah cannot expect rescue: On the contrary, it is God Himself who has brought the Babylonians against the city as the means of His judgment against the nation's wickedness
  - a. Zedekiah and all his corrupt cohorts will experience God's wrath
  - b. but in v. 8, Jeremiah turns to address the rest of the people of the city
  - c. and here is what the Lord says to them . . .

**“Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death.**

**<sup>9</sup> He who remains in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence; but he who goes out and defects to the Chaldeans who besiege you, he shall live, and his life shall be as a prize to him.**

**<sup>10</sup> For I have set My face against this city for adversity and not for good,” says the LORD. “It shall be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire.”**

11. Though the victory of the Babylonians is a foregone conclusion, there is still a way for *individuals* living in Jerusalem to escape *death* –
  - a. there's a way of life and a way of death that God sets before the people
  - b. if they will just listen and heed Jeremiah's prophecy they can *survive* the terrible days ahead.
12. The way of *death* is to remain in the city and suffer it's fate
13. The way of *life* is to forsake the city and go out to surrender to the Babylonians
14. At first look, it would seem that Jeremiah is advocating *betrayal* of Judah and Jerusalem
  - a. desertion of the city in it's hour of need appears to be disloyal
  - b. but it isn't
15. You see, God *Himself* had deserted Jerusalem
  - a. the Babylonians were in fact, His instrument of judgment
  - b. to leave the city and go over to the Babylonians, surrendering to them at this time would have been an act of surrender to and siding with God
16. Staying in the city would have been refusing to follow God's lead

17. So God says to the people of Jerusalem, “I set a fork in the road before you now.
  - a. stay here and die
  - b. go out and live

### **B. Go Or Stay**

1. It seems pretty obvious which choice the people ought to have made
2. As soon as Jeremiah spoke this prophecy, we would expect that the people would have gone home, packed their bags and headed out of the city by the thousands
3. But that is not the case; only a handful left
4. The vast majority decided to stick it out behind the walls of Jerusalem
5. The thought of leaving their homes and the neighborhoods they had become familiar with was too much for them
6. They had spent their lives working for their own comfort and they weren't about to just up and walk away from it now!
7. As they weighed the options God had set before them they were *short sighted*.
  - a. they didn't think of them in terms of *life* and *death*
  - b. but in terms of *leaving* or *staying*
8. The one critical factor that should have governed their decision, FAITH – was no where in sight
  - a. all they saw was the *present*
  - b. and they found the *comfort of the immediate* more weighty than the uncertainty that was a part of leaving and going over to the Babylonians
9. They reasoned: Here I have my house, my chair, my table, my kitchen, my donkey
  - a. I know where the market is
  - b. where my friends live
  - c. I have a job, and a comfortable lifestyle
10. If I leave and surrender to the Babylonians, I have no idea what will happen to me
  - a. where will I live?
  - b. what will become of my life?
11. We look back at this from the perspective of our age, living in the midst of our comforts, and we fault them for their lack of wisdom and faith
12. What we may not realize is that the very same choice faces us today

### **C. Two Ways**

1. Two ways lie before us this morning; What God said to them, the Spirit repeats to us!
2. “Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death.”
  - a. the way of life is to follow God's plan, to surrender to His will
  - b. the way of death is to reject His lead and to go our own way
3. Years before, as Israel was preparing to enter into the Promise Land, God had told them much the same thing . . .
  - a. in Deut. 11:26-28 we read

- 26 “Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse:
- 27 the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you today;
- 28 and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way which I command you today, to go after other gods which you have not known.
- b. Deut. 30 spells it out even more clearly . . .
- 15 “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil,
- 16 in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the LORD your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess.
- 17 But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them,
- 18 I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong *your* days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess.
- 19 I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, *that* I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live;

4. Listen to those words again and feel their weight . . .

**I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life!**

- a. life and blessing come from living God’s way, obeying Him, following His lead
  - b. death and the curse are the result of living our own way, rejecting God’s direction to follow the leading of our own desires.
5. The Proverbs tell us that there is a way that seems right to a man, but the end is death
- a. he travels the highway of his life, tooling along at 65
  - b. cruising with the top down and the wind blowing in his hair
  - c. the sun is shining the birds are singing & *Radar Love* is playing on the Bose Sound System
  - d. and so wrapped up in his own pleasure is he that he fails to see the sign on the side of the road that says, “Dead End – Bridge out”
  - e. only too late, as his car flies off the end of the road, does he realize he’s been a fool
6. Jesus said that broad is the way and many on it that leads to death, while narrow is the way and few on it, that leads to eternal life.

#### **D. Go Out**

1. Which path are you on this morning? I hope and pray the way you have taken is the way of life.
2. If not, if you’re going your own way rather than God’s, then in a few moments I am going to speak to you about why you ought to switch paths

3. But right now, I want to speak to those on the path of life
4. You see, God gave some very specific direction to the people of Jerusalem
  - a. following the way of life meant that they had to get up and get out of Jerusalem
  - b. it wasn't so much that He was telling them to surrender to the Babylonians as it was that they needed to flee the city because the city was going to become the object of His judgment
  - c. their defection was only incidental and secondary;
  - d. what was central was their *departure* from the object of God's wrath
5. Choosing the way of life today means that we get out of those things that are the objects of God's wrath: We must flee those pursuits that God will judge
6. In a word – we must *go out of the world*
  - a. I don't mean that we should make some mission to Mars
  - b. or even off into some secluded desert commune
  - c. by world I don't mean the physical planet, I mean the world's *system*
  - d. what we need to leave is *friendship with the world's way of living*
7. Listen to James 4 . . .
  - 4 **Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.**
8. Or 1 John 2 . . .
  - 15 **Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.**
  - 16 **For all that *is* in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.**
  - 17 **And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.**
9. I have to tell you, these verses make me very uncomfortable; and I think you know why
  - a. all too often I find myself seeking to sidle up to the world
  - b. I want to love and serve God but the world exerts a powerful pull on my desires
  - c. if I'm not careful, I find my value and sense of satisfaction determined by the abundance and status of my possessions
  - d. my security becomes dependant in how many people like me
  - e. I draw my sense of worth from how I look
10. Being a friend of the world doesn't mean that you're totally immersed in some kind of heinous sin
11. It simple means that you draw your sense of value and determine your priorities by the world's standards rather than God's
12. Following Christ, choosing life, means turning our back on the way of the world and learning to live by the values and priorities of the Kingdom of God!
13. And here is what Jesus says to those who choose the way of life: Here is what He says to those who follow Him – [Luke 9:62]
  - 62 **But Jesus said to him, “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking**

**back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”**

- a. Jesus spoke these words to a young man who came to him one day and said that he wanted to follow Jesus, *after* he had taken care of some personal business
  - b. it's that mentality so often seen by people when they consider giving their lives to Christ,
    - 1) they think, “You know, I really ought to do this, but there are a couple things I want to do first.”
    - 2) “I know as a Christian, I can't do them, so let me do them *first*, then I'll come and get right with God.”
  - c. Jesus serves notice on this kind of thinking that it's utterly incompatible with the Kingdom of God and following Him.
  - d. He is not someone who will take the *left-overs* of our lives
  - e. He's God and He deserves the best we have to offer – not what's left once we've had our fun!
  - f. He will not compete with the things of this world for our affections!
14. The picture here is a farmer who is plowing a field
- a. the key to making straight rows and so getting a rich harvest,
  - b. is to keep your head straight and your eyes fixed on a point across the field
  - c. if you look back at where you've been, the plow gets off track and ruins the integrity of the field
15. Christian, if you've put your hand to the plow of following Christ – look ahead, not back
- a. if you've determined to follow Christ – then keep your eyes fixed on Him
  - b. there is no room for longing glances backward at the world, at past relationships and pursuits
16. In Luke 17, Jesus issues this terse warning; “Remember Lot's wife!”
- a. it comes in the context of His foretelling the future destruction of Jerusalem,
  - b. He tells them that when it comes it will be so swift they aren't to even stop to pack a bag – they have to flee!
  - c. then He says, “Remember Lot's wife!”
  - d. the message was clear to the disciples
    - 1) in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, as Lot, his wife and two daughters were fleeing the valley that was to be the scene of God's judgment
    - 2) Lot's wife lagged behind because she was reluctant to leave her home and the place of so many memories
    - 3) and because she lagged behind, her steps dogged by reluctance, she ended up being consumed by the judgment God intended for Sodom
  - e. Jesus uses the lesson of Lot's wife to warn His followers – “Remember Lot's Wife!”
  - f. God's wrath boils against this corrupt world and one day it is going to boil over in judgment
  - g. God calls His people to come out from among them and be separate
    - 1) again, not running off into some secluded commune

- 2) but separate in our lifestyles and values
- 3) separate and different in our choices and behavior

### III. CONCLUSION

#### A. Fence-Sitting

1. God says, “Behold – I have set before you the way of life and the way of death.”
2. It seems that a lot of people who call themselves Christians think there’s a *third* way
  - a. in addition to the way of life and the way of death
  - b. they walk in the way of *compromise* and *accommodation*
  - c. they want to enjoy the *benefits* of the Christian life without the *responsibilities*
  - d. they want *eternal life* and *heaven*, but they don’t want *obedience* and *discipline*
3. Remember Lot’s Wife!
4. If you’ve put your hand to the plow – don’t look back!
5. The way of life is forward, not to the side
6. We must put on the blinders of *commitment* and not allow the distractions of this world’s enticements to get us off track

#### B. To The Lost

1. Finally, a word to those here this morning who aren’t Christians
2. There’s still time to change the road you’re on.
3. There’s time > but that time is *right now*
4. Don’t count on tomorrow, because tomorrow isn’t guaranteed.
5. Those people in Jerusalem in Jeremiah’s day when these words were first uttered counted on their days continuing to come just as they always had.
6. They refused to listen to the prophet that on one of those days, the walls of Jerusalem would finally fall, and the Babylonians swords would execute God’s judgment on them
7. There’s time to change the path you’re on if you use the time you have – which is this moment!
8. Choose life – Choose Christ!