

The Fate of the Lost • Jeremiah 39:1-7

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *The Season*

1. Today we enter that great season in the Christian Year that celebrates the Death & Resurrection of our Lord & Savior – Jesus Christ
2. While the world will celebrate with colored eggs and chocolate bunnies, we will truly celebrate the greatest news to every be uttered by human lips – Jesus is risen!
3. On Easter Sunday morning, April 23rd, we will gather at the Oxnard High School Stadium and sing praises to our Conquering King, and we will proclaim the truth of the Resurrection.
4. My subject that morning will be the Glory of Heaven, and how we can get there.
5. It seems appropriate then, that we look at the flip side of that message.
 - a. if the saved will enjoy the eternal glory of heavenly bliss
 - b. what will be the fate of the lost?
6. It just so happens that the Book of Jeremiah gives us an apt picture of judgment and hell

B. *Preaching About Hell*

1. Preaching on this subject is no easy task
2. And I'm sure many of you were not anticipating something this heavy this morning
3. But I am constrained by the Spirit of God to share His *full* counsel.
 - a. I'm not at liberty to cover only those subjects I like
 - b. I cannot pick and choose what topics I'll teach from this pulpit
 - c. if I am to be faithful to God's calling as shepherd, then I have to speak the hard words, as well as the comforting ones
 - d. the ministry of the preacher is to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable
4. So be forewarned – what we are about to look at is challenging
5. But if it compels one person here today to give themselves to Christ, and it presses home on even one believer the urgency to share the gospel with the lost, then it's been worth it
6. Charles Spurgeon once said to his class of students who were being trained for the ministry, "When you talk about *heaven* let your face light up with a heavenly glory. When you tell about hell, your everyday face will do."
7. On Easter, I hope my face will reflect the glory of heaven.
8. Today – it's my everyday face!

II. TEXT

A. *Vs. 1-2*

1 In the ninth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army came against Jerusalem, and besieged it.

2 In the eleventh year of Zedekiah, in the fourth month, on the ninth day of the month, the city was penetrated.

1. This is it! This is what Jeremiah had been saying would happen for the past 40 years!
 - a. he had been warning the people that the Babylonians were coming as God's judgment for their idolatry
 - b. and for 40 years the people had rejected both him and his message of repentance
 - c. for 40 years, they had deluded themselves by thinking that *somehow* they would escape
 - d. the nation had been threatened by foreign armies in the past, but they had always managed to get out of trouble
 - e. they told themselves it would be the same again
2. Even when the Babylonians arrived and set up their siege camp outside the walls, the people in Jerusalem believed they could out wait their attackers
3. So time passed – in fact, using the Hebrew calendar and the way it reckoned the reign of kings, the siege ended up lasting 2½ years!
4. Imagine if you can what conditions *inside* Jerusalem must have been like by the time the city fell
 - a. other accounts tell us of the famine and cannibalism that was taking place
 - b. the sanitary conditions were beyond description!
 - c. and so weak did the defenders get, they could no longer man the walls and hold the Babylonians at bay with their arrows
 - d. so the Babylonians drew near and made a breach in the wall
5. Then they poured in like water flooding through a hole in a dam

B. Vs. 3

3 Then all the princes of the king of Babylon came in and sat in the Middle Gate: Nergal-Sharezer, Samgar-Nebo, Sarsechim, Rabsaris, Nergal-Sarezer, Rabmag, with the rest of the princes of the king of Babylon.

1. As soon as the initial troops entered the city, they secured the northern area,
2. Then the Babylonian military leaders entered and set up their pavilion.
3. It was there that they would set their *ceremonial* thrones, and by doing so, make the official statement that they had now captured the city
4. Since the gate was the place of authority in the ancient city, when a king set up his throne there, it was equivalent to capturing the other guys flag
5. As soon as the Babylonians set up their pavilion, someone quickly ran to King Zedekiah and told him
6. He now knew he was defeated – there would be no rescue, no last minute miracles from God that would intervene and save him
7. Jeremiah had been right all long – and Zedekiah knew he had been a fool
8. So, what would we expect Zedekiah to do?
 - a. why – we would expect that he would immediately humble himself and surrender to the Babylonian officials

- b. after all, that is what Jeremiah had been counseling him to do all along
- c. is that what Zedekiah does? No.

C. Vs. 4-7

4 So it was, when Zedekiah the king of Judah and all the men of war saw them, that they fled and went out of the city by night, by way of the king's garden, by the gate between the two walls. And he went out by way of the plain.

1. Even though Zedekiah knew that he had been wrong and Jeremiah right, still, he chose to follow his own foolish ways rather than take the course God had told him to follow
2. He *ran*
 - a. he snuck out of the secret gate near the palace and followed a special escape route that had been built for just such a time as this
 - b. he and his party of supporters made their stealthy way down the Kidron Valley, up the south side of the Mount of Olives,
 - c. then they headed east toward the city of Jericho
 - d. no doubt their plan was to high-tail it across the Jordan river and find refuge in the city of Rabbah

5 But the Chaldean army pursued them and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho. And when they had captured him, they brought him up to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, to Riblah in the land of Hamath, where he pronounced judgment on him.

6 Then the king of Babylon killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes in Riblah; the king of Babylon also killed all the nobles of Judah.

7 Moreover he put out Zedekiah's eyes, and bound him with bronze fetters to carry him off to Babylon.

3. The Babylonians weren't about to let Zedekiah get away
4. As soon as they discovered he and his party had left, they chased them down and overtook them near Jericho
5. Then they took them 200 miles north to Riblah, where King Nebuchadnezzar of the Babylonians had his headquarters.
6. And it was there that Zedekiah faced his own personal judgment
 - a. while he was made to watch, his officials, the men who had supported him in his rebellion against God, were cruelly put to death
 - b. then, his own children were brought up, and one by one they were slain before him
 - c. we know enough of the way the Babylonians treated their enemies that they were brutal and devious in cruelty and would have delighted in their torment of Zedekiah
 - d. finally, immediately after witnessing the torturous execution of his own children, his eyes were put out, so that for the rest of his life, the last memory he would have was seeing his children being murdered
 - e. what agony – what torment!
 - f. and what made it worse was the realization that it was his own foolish choices, his own rejection of God's Word that had led him to this place

7. Bound in bronze shackles, he was taken back to Babylon, thrown into prison, where he lived out the rest of his pitiful life.

D. A Picture of Judgment

1. What an incredible picture of the inevitability of judgment this is
2. For 40 years Jeremiah had warned the kings of Judah to repent and not resist the Babylonians because they were God's judgment
3. If Zedekiah had listened to Jeremiah and done what he said,
 - a. the city would have been spared instead of leveled by fire
 - b. the temple would not have been destroyed
 - c. Zedekiah's own family and friends would have been saved
4. But Zedekiah chose to reject the Word of God in favor of what he *wanted* to be true – that the nation of Judah would know nothing but continued peace and prosperity
5. Even when the reports reached him that the Babylonians had marched into the territory of their neighbors, he thought Judah would escape
6. Then when scouts came and told him the Babylonians had pierced the northern border of Judah and were moving south toward Jerusalem, he thought that rescue was surely just around the corner.
7. Then the enemy came within eyesight – but still he hoped in some miraculous rescue
8. They set up camp around the walls of Jerusalem and now Zedekiah could actually see the faces of the besiegers
9. Even then, he trusted in some fiction of his own imagination
10. Zedekiah is a perfect picture of most unbelievers
 - a. judgment is coming as certainly as night follows day, but they have told themselves that somehow, they'll escape
 - b. when they're young, and death seems distant, they give little thought to judgment
 - c. even when the occasional messenger comes to remind them of death in the loss of a relative or friend, they act as though death is something that happens to *others*, but they are exempt from
 - d. as they get older, they refuse to consider death because it is such a downer
 - e. they hold on to youth as long as they can – why? Because they don't want to think about death
 - f. as they age and enter into the backside of years, they continue to shun thinking about death because it's become habit now
 - g. and when death finally marches up and lays siege to their body, they continue to act as though it's business as usual, though in fact, they are in the last 2½ years of their life
 - h. one day, the walls will be breached and death will enter
11. Friends, there is no fleeing from the inevitability of death and judgment
12. Hear me well – *Everyone* will face judgment: The only choice we have is which judgment we will face
 - a. those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ will face a judgment for *rewards*

- 1) if you believe in the work of Jesus Christ on the cross,
- 2) then the judgment that is due your *sin* was taken off you and was paid by Him
- 3) and the only judgment you will know now is to stand before the Lord and receive a reward for living a life of faithfulness
- b. but for those who have *rejected* Christ, for those who like Zedekiah have refused to listen and respond to the Word and invitation of God, the judgment you will face is not for rewards, but for *punishment*
 - 1) you will bear the guilt and weight of your sin
 - 2) and you will bear it for all of eternity!
13. You cannot escape God's judgment
 - a. there is no miracle that will rescue you in the 11th hour
 - b. there is no last seat on the last plane out
 - c. there will be no hand reaching down to you from the helicopter as it lifts into the air and sails away to safety
14. They'll be no place to run and hide
 - a. they'll be no fig leaves of self-righteousness you can hide behind
 - b. no clever excuses, "The dog ate my homework" won't work with God
15. Listen to me, PLEASE: If you do not know Christ, the day will come when you will stand before the Holy God and His eyes, like a flame of pure fire, will bore into your very heart and lay bare your inner thoughts and motivations
 - a. every time you heard the truth and rejected it
 - b. every time the Holy Spirit convicted you and persuaded you to surrender to Christ, but you turned away
 - c. they will all come out for all to see and you will realize, like Zedekiah did in that last moment before his eyes were put out, that you have played the consummate fool – BUT IT WILL BE TOO LATE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

E. Hell

1. This passage from Jeremiah also gives us a picture of the torment of hell
2. Zedekiah suffered the loss of everything
 - a. he lost his throne, he lost his home
 - b. he lost his friends, he lost his family
 - c. then he lost his sight
3. All he was left with was *existence* and the tormenting memory of his own foolishness
4. How many times over the next several years as he sat in that dismal prison in Babylon do you suppose Zedekiah said, "If I had only chosen differently."
 - a. "If I had only listened to Jeremiah and been obedient to the Word of God."
 - b. "Oh how I wish I could go back and do it over again."
5. *Regret* is a powerful and painful emotion.
6. I imagine hell is the consummate expression of *regret*
7. What do we know about hell; what does the Bible tell us . . .
8. Jesus repeatedly called it a place of outer darkness, where there is weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth^[1]
9. It is *outer darkness* because there is *no light* there

- a. stark, bare darkness – total blindness
 - b. if you ever take a tour through a cave, one of the things the guides like to do is demonstrate the darkness that exists in a cave
 - c. so they wait until you are in some room at the very bottom of the cave, and they tell everyone to grab on to something
 - d. then they turn off the lights
 - e. now, you and I are used to having some kind of light, even in the dead of night it isn't completely dark – we can still see the outline and basic shape of things
 - f. but when they turn off the lights in a cave, there is no sunlight, moonlight, streetlamps, nightlights, flashlights
 - g. it is utterly dark – and it is disorienting; that's why they tell you to hold on to something
 - h. when all light is removed from your open eyes, your brain tells you something is wrong and it can cause you to get dizzy and fall down
 - i. some people who have gotten lost in caves for more than a few hours have been known to go mad
10. Hell is God honoring the choice that people have made to reject Him
- a. while they've lived on this earth, they've been the recipients of His love and grace
 - b. they've enjoyed the fruit of His benevolence
 - c. every time they draw a breath and their lungs fill with oxygen, it's the gift of God
 - d. every time they open their eyes and see the flowers and the snow-capped mountains, or their children playing in the yard, it's a manifestation of God's love and care for them
 - e. hell is God saying "Alright" to their rejection of Him from their lives
 - f. hell is eternal existence without the grace and benevolence of God
 - 1) since God is light, there is no light in hell, only darkness!
 - 2) since God gives the air to fill our lungs, there will be only an empty vacuum in hell – imagine suffocating for eternity
 - 3) companionship is one of God's most precious gifts to us; friends & family
 - 4) hell is eternal loneliness; it's existing forever and ever and never once touching or hearing another soul
11. You see the great battle we face is the simple choice of self, or God
- a. if we die to self and chose God, then we get heaven, we get God, and we get a new self thrown in!
 - b. but if we chose self; then that's what we get, and that's all we get; self, alone, FOREVER!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
 - c. Jesus said, "He who seeks to save his life shall lose it, but he who loses his life for my sake shall find it."
 - d. every so often you meet someone who thinks they've got a clever answer to why they aren't a Christian and don't want to be
 - e. they say that they want to go to hell because that is where their friends will be
 - f. maybe – but they'll be no reunion!

12. No wonder Jesus calls it a place of weeping and wailing!
 - a. but the only weeping and wailing a man or woman will hear are the echoes of their own voice ringing back to mock them
 - b. in the book of Revelation, hell is called the Lake of Fire
 - c. and as you know there's been a huge debate over whether or not there's a literal fire in hell
 - d. my answer to that is; "What matter does it make?"
 - e. the point is that the torment of hell is beyond comprehension
 - f. what's the most intense pain people are familiar with?
 - 1) Being burned!
 - 2) even after you take your hand out of the flame, it still feels like it is being burned – that's why we call it a "burn"
 - 3) the pain lingers – the memory of it remains long after the finger or whatever is removed
 - g. whether there is literal, black flames that give no light in hell, or fire is merely being used as an everyday emblem for intense pain, the point is, hell is a place of the *epitome of torment*
 - h. that's why Jesus said there is gnashing of teeth
 - 1) the pain is so great, the jaws of one's mouth will be clamped until the teeth grind
 - 2) every so often a tortured wail will escape, then the mouth will snap shut again in pain
13. If heaven is the epitome of blessing and bliss, which it is; then hell is the epitome of being cursed and pain
14. If heaven is the realization of why we were created, then hell is the complete loss of it
15. If heaven is peace and joy, hell is turmoil and sorrow
16. If heaven is life and love, hell is bare, naked existence and utter loneliness!
17. And I am sorry, I can say no more!

III. CONCLUSION

A. To The Saved

1. I want to end this morning by speaking to believers first, and then to those who for whatever reason haven't embraced Christ as Savior
2. First to the Christians:
3. Please, don't ever let the words, "Go to hell," ever escape your lips again
 - a. to say those words it to have no concept of what hell is really like
 - b. if you are a genuine believer, there is not a single person you would want to go there
4. Rather, let the reality of the certain fate of unbelievers compel you to be a Jeremiah to them
 - a. warn them!
 - b. judgment is coming; it is inevitable
5. If they will but surrender to Jesus Christ, they can be saved and rescued from the wrath to come

6. I know that if you and I were allowed a 5 second peek into hell, we would come away so shaken it would turn us into unstoppable evangelists!
7. May God's Spirit give us the sense of *urgency* that marked the prophet Jeremiah, and the perseverance that even when we and our message is rejected, we keep at it – because it is absolutely true

B. To The Lost

1. Finally, to those here who have not received Christ
2. How long will you hold back? What are you waiting for?
3. Will you really follow in the footsteps of Zedekiah?
4. While you draw breath, count it as a gift of God and a measure of His mercy, giving you one more chance to receive His offer of forgiveness.
5. But know this – if you resist, and blow it off – JUDGMENT IS COMING & HELL IS REAL!

[1] 7 times in the gospels, Jesus speaks of the destination of the wicked.