

Deadly Disobedience, Living Faith

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[0 : 00] Now, if you would turn, please, to the book of Jeremiah. We're reading chapter 39, and this is on page 667 if you're using the church Bibles.

Jeremiah chapter 39, and we'll read the whole chapter. 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.

In the eleventh year of Zedekiah, in the fourth month, on the ninth day of the month, a breach was made in the city. Then all the officials of the king of Babylon came and sat in the middle gate, Nergal Sarezer, Samgar Nebu, Sar Sikkim, the Rabsaris, Nergal Sarezer, the Rab Mag, with all the rest of the officers of the king of Babylon.

When Zedekiah, king of Judah, and all the soldiers saw them, they fled, going out of the city at night by way of the king's garden through the gate between the two walls, and they went towards the Arabah.

But the army of the Chaldeans pursued them and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho. When they had taken him, they brought him up to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, at Riblah, in the land of Hamath.

[1 : 29] And he passed sentence on him. King of Babylon slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah at Riblah before his eyes. And the king of Babylon slaughtered all the nobles of Judah.

He put out the eyes of Zedekiah and bound him in chains to take him to Babylon. The Chaldeans burned the king's house and the house of the people and broke down the walls of Jerusalem.

Then Nebuchadnezzar, the captain of the guard, carried into exile to Babylon the rest of the people who were left in the city, those who had deserted to him and the people who remained.

Nebuchadnezzar, the captain of the guard, left in the land of Judah some of the poor people who owned nothing and gave them vineyards and fields at the same time.

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, gave command concerning Jeremiah through Nebuchadnezzar, the captain of the guard, saying, Take him and look after him well and do him no harm, but deal with him as he tells you.

[2 : 31] So Nebuchadnezzar, the captain of the guard, Nebuchadnezzar, the rabsaris, Nebuchadnezzar, Nergal, Sereza, the rabmag, and all the chief officers of the king of Babylon, sent and took Jeremiah from the court of the guard.

They entrusted him to Gedali, the son of Ahicham, son of Shaphan, that he should take him home. So he lived among the people. The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah while he was shut up in the court of the guard.

Go and say to Ebed-Melech, the Ethiopian, Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Behold, I will fulfill my words against this city for harm and not for good, and they shall be accomplished before you on that day.

But I will deliver you on that day, declares the Lord, and you shall not be given into the hand of the men of whom you are afraid, for I will surely save you, and you shall not fall by the sword, but you shall have your life as a prize of war, because you have put your trust in me, declares the Lord.

Amen. This is the word of the Lord, and may he bless it to our hearts. And now, if you could have your Bibles open, please, at page 667, and we'll have a moment of prayer.

[4 : 00] Lord God, as we come to your word, we praise you that you have not allowed us to struggle and grope our way towards you. You have given to us the written word, the word which so fully and faithfully proclaims the living word, the Lord Christ.

And we pray indeed that the gracious Holy Spirit, who gave that word and gave that word to Jeremiah, in this case, may indeed speak, speaking in the age-old word, which is still the message

for today, and indeed indeed the message for all eternity.

And we ask this in his name. Amen. Amen. A well-known preacher of the middle of the 20th century, the distinguished Methodist Dr. Sangster told of one day how he paid a visit to a grieving home whose worst nightmares had come true.

He'd lost a much-loved child. And Sangster did his best, as anyone would do in these circumstances, to commiserate with them, to pray with them. He came away feeling utterly, utterly downcast.

He felt he'd said nothing that was of any help, and he was totally, totally moved, and felt something of the agony of that grieving family.

[5 : 28] And Sangster said, as he walked along the street, he passed the church, with what he describes as a silly, chirpy, wayside pulpit, saying, cheer up, it may never happen.

And Sangster shouted out, to the surprise of the passers-by, but it has happened. For that grieving family there, it had happened. Their nightmares had come true, and they had no idea how they were ever going to cope with life again.

In Jeremiah 39, it has happened. Judah, Jerusalem, and the house of David are wiped out.

Jeremiah, in chapter 1, verse 3, or rather, the Lord says to Jeremiah, you'll preach about the exile. The exile had come. It's difficult, actually, to exaggerate the importance of the trauma of this event. If you want to understand Old Testament history, see how it revolves around two poles, almost a thousand years apart.

The great story of the Exodus, when Yahweh, God of Israel, led his people out of Egypt, defeated their enemies, led them across the sea, gathered them at Sinai, and made them into a nation.

[6 : 44] And indeed, this is how Moses describes what happened at the Exodus. Yahweh says, in Exodus chapter 12, I will pass through Egypt tonight, and against all the gods of Egypt, I will carry out judgment.

I am Yahweh. Does this mean now that he is weaker than Marduk and Nebo, the gods of Babylon? What's happened? Where is Jerusalem, the city of the great king?

Zion, glorious things of you are spoken, Zion, city of our God. Where is it now? Where the temple has gone. That's not particularly emphasized here, although he does in a later account, in chapter 52.

And worse still, the house of David has gone, apparently forever. Where is the promise of 2 Samuel 7? There will never fail a son of David to sit on the throne.

They are back in the land that Abraham left, what C.S. Lewis called the pilgrim's regress. The horror of the time is echoed in the book of Lamentations.

[7 : 49] Read the shuddering horror and misery of these words. This story made such an impression. It's told four times. It's told here.

It's told again in chapter 52. It's told in 2 Kings 25 and in 2 Chronicles 36. And it's echoed in many of the Psalms. By the rivers of Babylon, we sat down.

We wept as we remembered Zion. The thing that the false prophets have said could never happen. The tragedy that they did not believe would take place had now happened.

It had happened and they have to come to terms with it. Now the account is stark. It's a bleak, stark story. But once again, as we notice so often in Jeremiah, the emphasis is not just on the events. The emphasis is on how the prophetic word has been received. How are people going to make sense of this event? In other words, how are they going to respond to the words of God who's spoken by his prophet?

[8 : 55] I've got two main points this evening which is really our title. First of all, Deadly Disobedience in verses 1 to 10 and Living Faith in verses 11 to 18.

So that's the two points. Deadly Disobedience and Living Faith. First of all then, Deadly Disobedience Disobedience verses 1 to 10. This is a severely compressed account.

There's a fuller account in chapter 52 and also in 2 Kings 25. Now let's look at it then. And the first thing is the truly horrific fate of King Zedekiah.

The irony is this is a man who's played for safety first. This is a man who in the last few chapters said to Jeremiah, Oh, I can't stand up for you because I'm terrified of what the officials, what my people will do to me.

Well, he suffered far, far worse here than he would ever have suffered if he had stood up for the truth. See, as recently as the previous chapter, 38 verse 20, Jeremiah says to Zedekiah, Obey now

the voice of the Lord in what I say to you and it shall be well with you and your life will be spared. [10:11] That is just literally days before these awful events unfold because God is merciful and that's applied to God's attitude towards the whole of humanity in 2 Peter.

2 Peter chapter 3 verse 9 says, God is patient, long-suffering, not wishing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

You see, what he's willing to do for Zedekiah, this is the message of grace to the whole of humanity. The trouble is, Zedekiah is a fatal ditherer, a born loser.

He neither resists nor surrenders. He abandons the sheep to the wolves. Ghastly and total failure of leadership.

David had been told by the Lord, you will be shepherd of my people Israel. The true shepherd doesn't run away while the wolf comes. This is what Zedekiah did. It's difficult to imagine a more total failure of leadership.

[11:14] He had been set up by Nebuchadnezzar some years before as a puppet king. But his real failure was not, as I say, that he was a weak man.

It was that he was an unbelieving man. He ignored and disbelieved the word of God. Very interesting how the letter of the Hebrews speaks of leadership in chapter 13.

Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you. I want you to think about this for a moment. You might well think, well, this is a weak man.

He runs in panic. But you know, we are not condemned because we are weak or saved because we are strong. Read the great story of another early king, Jehoshaphat, in 2 Chronicles chapter 20. Jehoshaphat was a good man, but a weak man. Far too keen to cozy up to the idolatrous Ahab and his family. And yet, when a crisis came, the same kind of crisis, when Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, was faced with a vast army, what does he do?

[12:20] He doesn't turn tail and run. He prays to the Lord and says, Lord, we have no strength, but our help is in you. So you see, as I say, it's not whether we are strong naturally, whether we are bold and macho naturally, it's whether we believe or not.

If Zedekiah had believed, this horrific fate that overtook him and his family could have been averted. So that's the first thing to know, Sunder, deadly disobedience.

The unbeliever here is caught up in a ghastly fate because he is an unbeliever, not because he's a weak man. Secondly, there's the emphasis on the disastrous end of David's line.

Verses 60, it could not be bleaker. It really is, in fact, I think the very restraint in which the story is told makes it all the more chilling. Verse 6, the king of Babylon slaughter the sons of Zedekiah, slaughter the sons of David, if you like, before his eyes, slaughter all the nobles of Judah.

The last thing Zedekiah would see and it would haunt him for the rest of his days was the death of his family. It is truly ghastly. Never again would a son of David sit on the throne in Jerusalem.

[13:43] The dream is over, isn't it? Or is it? The reader of Jeremiah will not have forgotten chapter 33, verse 25 and 26, which I'll read.

In, this is part of the New Covenant passages, chapter 33, verse 25, Thus says the Lord, If I have not established my covenant with day and night and the fixed order of heaven and earth, then I will reject the offspring of Jacob and David my servant, and I will not choose one of his offspring to rule over the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, for I will restore their fortunes and have mercy on them.

Well, the dream is dead, but there's a bigger and better dream on the horizon. And we're impelled forward, surely, to look, chapter 1, verse 32 and 33, the words of Gabriel to Mary.

The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.

The house of David is not gone. When we come to the final study in Jeremiah, we'll find that at the very end of the book, there is a hint of hope for the house of David.

[15:04] And then we'd impel further to the book of Revelation, chapter 5, the line of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has conquered. He's already conquered, but you see, the fulfillment of this still lies in the future.

He has conquered. He is able to open the seals and pronounce judgment on history. His final triumph is still future. These words will be fulfilled.

No unbelief, the unbelief of an unworthy son of David cannot prevent it happening. Once again, think of the words of Paul in Romans chapter, it's either 9 or 10, talking about the fall of Israel.

If their transgression means riches for the world and their loss means riches for the nation, how much greater riches will their fullness, will their restoration bring?

The son of David, this son of David, hopeless failure, but the son of David who is to come will reverse all that and more than reverse it, he will bring in the kingdom that will never end.

[16:14] But we mustn't, we mustn't play down the bleakness of these verses. This is truly traumatic, it is truly dreadful, and it is, and it is the end, as I say, of a dream, particularly the end of a dream peddled by the false prophets whom we've read about earlier on.

The Lord will not allow the city to be destroyed. Thinking back to the great days of Hezekiah when the Lord had rescued the city, forgetting totally that Hezekiah was a very different man from Zedekiah.

It was astonishing, people's capacity for delusion. In AD 70, when the Romans were about to make their final assault on Jerusalem, some of the rabbis were still saying, God will never abandon his city with the exile behind them, this wishful fulfillment.

But it's great to go on to the second part of the chapter, which is a part about living faith. In contrast to deadly disobedience, there is living faith, living obedience.

The first thing to notice is the contrast of the prophet and the king. Contrast of Zedekiah and Jeremiah. Notice the man who had suffered terribly and risked everything is released.

[17:31] We'll see a fuller account of that next week. Very probable Jewish refugees had told Nebuchadnezzar about Jeremiah. Surely Jeremiah is a classic example of what the Lord Jesus Christ said, He who saves his life will lose it.

And he who, Zedekiah rather, and of course Jeremiah, he who loses his life will save it. And notice the, notice the last phrase of verse 14, He lived among the people.

This shepherd is not going to desert the people who remain. And of course, the Lord provided shepherds in Babylon. Remember Ezekiel and Daniel who were in Babylon during the exile.

This shepherd is not going to desert his people. And this little human touch here in verse, in the same verse, he should take him home.

Home comforts was something that Jeremiah had known little or nothing of in the previous 30 or so years. So you see, the man who risked everything, the man whom last time we saw was put in a cistern, ill-treated in a dungeon, this man survives and this man is rescued.

[18:52] So the contrast of prophet and king. But notice as well, Jeremiah's words are authenticated, not just generally, but in detail.

Verse 3, all these guys with their funny names, names, high Babylonian officials, this exactly fulfills Jeremiah's first words in chapter 1 where it says 1 verse 15, king of Babylon shall set his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem.

Jeremiah was given, was told to pluck up, to break down, to destroy and to overthrow. This is what's happening. And even more in chapter 1.18 we read these words.

Jeremiah, God says to Jeremiah, Jeremiah, the whole establishment is against you. The king is against you. The prophets are against you. The priests are against you. Indeed, the whole people are against you.

Jeremiah wasn't the kind of radical preacher who gained a popular following. Everybody hated him. Nobody, nobody wanted to listen to him. What does the Lord say? I will make you a fortified city.

[20:03] That sounded like whistling in the wind except that the fortified city of Jerusalem has gone and Jeremiah remains. Now, it took years but it happened.

Jeremiah proves to be a true prophet. Moses says in Deuteronomy chapter 18, one of the ways you recognize a true prophet is that what they say comes true.

It may not be enough, I suppose. And it took years but it happened. They say it happened not just in general terms but in detail. that's why coming back for a moment to chapter 33, if the prophecies of destruction were to be fulfilled so meticulously, surely the promises of blessing are going to be fulfilled as well.

Not all of them have been fulfilled but we can trust these words, these words that spoke of judgment and judgment happened. Those words that spoke of blessing, those words that embodied in Jesus Christ, the true son of David.

Remember the words of 1 John, the world passes away but the one who does the will of God remains forever. The world had passed away. The city is in smoking ruins.

[21 : 17] The false prophets, those who still survive, will have red faces but Jeremiah remains. He continues and of course he continues until today.

Oh, how do we know what the false prophets said? We only know because Jeremiah interacts with them. Jeremiah condemns what they say but here in scripture these words of Jeremiah remain for us and for every generation as the true word of God.

The one who loses his life for my sake and the gospel will save it but the one who saves his life will lose it. So the prophet remains.

But I think it's the last few verses that are particularly pleasing. This is a kind flashback to the chapter 38. Go say to Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian.

A fortnight ago we looked at this how this brave man Ebed-Melech rescued Jeremiah from certain death in the cistern and he in that account read it later on in chapter 38.

[22 : 23] Circumstantial account which is clearly an eyewitness account. He had rescued Jeremiah and he in turn is going to be rescued. But notice the emphasis once again on judgment.

I will fulfill my words verse 16 against this city for harm and not for good and you will see it happen. Destruction for the unbeliever but salvation for Ebed-Melech.

Remember I said Ebed-Melech means the servant of the king. No doubt he had faithfully served Zedekiah to the best of his ability although willing to risk the king's anger by rescuing Jeremiah but surely he is the servant of a far greater king.

I will deliver you verse 17 I think the eyes emphatic here I am the one who will deliver you and you will not be given into the hands of the men of whom you are afraid.

Obviously when Ebed-Melech undertook this rescue mission he would fear he would be reported and get into serious trouble and as so often as God does with Jeremiah himself and as God still does he doesn't take away the fight he stands with the fighter and that's what's happening here if God is for Ebed-Melech who can be against him?

[23 : 46] So that is God's side I am the one who will save you. What's the human side? Because you have put your trust in me declares the Lord and notice how these two things go together this is not what's sometimes called blind faith Ebed-Melech clearly believed the words of Jeremiah believed that what Jeremiah said about Yahweh God of Israel was true what the false prophets said was untrue and therefore he risked everything on that not so much blind faith as faith in the living word of the living God you have your life as a prize of war because you have put your trust in me declares the Lord you see this is this is a very living word we are not Ebed-Melech but we have Ebed-Melech God obviously we're not anybody in the Bible but we have the God of the Bible and it's always this is what covenant is about remember

Jeremiah is the prophet of the new covenant what is covenant in essence covenant is God commits himself totally and unasked unlooked for he commits himself he gives himself in love what does he ask he asks for love in return that's why covenant is a marriage relationship and this is what Ebed-Melech is doing Ebed-Melech is saying I don't know everything but I'm going to trust in you as I said the other week this is a man who's mentioned only here in scripture he's not one of the superstars he's not a big name it's wonderful how the Bible it's a great study sometimes do this sometime look at the things that are done in the Bible by unknowns for the Lord great antidote to celebrity culture which is so much part of evangelicalism Ebed-Melech was not a celebrity but Ebed-Melech put his trust in

God so here's a message for us then as now his message is trust and obey because there really is no other way but to trust the promises and obey the commands that was true in Jerusalem as it fell to Babylon that is true in us as we face the particular problems of our time we can be unbelieving we can reject the word as Zedekiah did we may not suffer the consequences immediately or we can trust as Jeremiah did as Ebed-Melech did later on in a few weeks we're going to see that the other staunch friend of Jeremiah Baruch his scribe was also given a promise of blessing and this God is our God God whom we can trust and a God whom we must be let's pray God our

Father we recognize in ourselves so much weakness we are we realize that we cannot depend on our own strength and yet you have shown us in your word that that weakness will not destroy us provided we trust and obey and indeed this is what we ask that we may do this evening and in all the days to come in Jesus name Amen