

Message Series: The Whole Counsel of God, Message 30
Lessons From A Bad Example. The Book of Jeremiah
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If you are a parent, have you ever pointed your children to someone's bad example and said, "*Don't do that!*" "*Don't be like that or the same will happen to you.*" Our Heavenly Father does the same with us. Look at 1 Corinthians 10:6, 11...

God points to the bad examples of the Old Testament and says to us, "*Learn from their examples, don't learn it first hand.*" The Old Testament book of Jeremiah is perfect one to apply this principle to. Reading through the book I asked myself what are some lessons I need to learn from the bad example of these people that I would rather not learn first hand? I listed **six lessons**.

Please open your Bible to the book of Jeremiah...

Lesson # 1 - When you've got a good thing going, don't spoil it!

In the opening chapters of this book, God through the prophet Jeremiah uses several illustrations of the spoiled relationship that existed between Him and the people of Judah. I want to point out just a few of them to you:

The Well - 2:13...

God was saying they had a relationship with Him, the fountain of living water, they had a well that would never run dry, but they decided to dig their own wells which could not hold water.

The Building - 7:1-4...

The first half of Jeremiah's ministry was to a people experiencing prosperity and even revival, but in most cases it was shallow and not really based on a genuine relationship with God. Actually they exchanged the glory of God for the building itself. They were trusting in the building.

The Belt - 13:1-11...

The girdle was a waistband or belt that the men used to tuck their valuables and currency in. God used the belt to illustrate the opportunity that existed for the people of Judah with Him. They were bound close to Him and filled with His riches, and yet they allowed themselves to become unprofitable and useless. They spoiled a good thing.

Remember a few years ago a Florida State football player that everyone expected to win the Heisman Trophy, along with that he be drafted high, and be able to sign a huge contract, but in the middle of the year he and some friends went into a clothing store and were caught shop-lifting clothes. He was kicked off the team and lost everything. He had a good thing going and spoiled it.

That is exactly what God is saying in the opening chapters of the book of Jeremiah to the people of Judah. They had a wonderful relationship with God, had His riches available to them, and they spoiled it and became unprofitable.

The lesson for us today is obvious; we should not do what they did! We too have a wonderful relationship with God. According to Ephesians 1:3, every spiritual blessing in heavenly places is ours. We have a great thing going in our relationship with God, how foolish it would be to spoil that relationship by chasing after the imaginations of our own heart as the people of Judah did.

Lesson # 2 – When God is the Sovereign One, don't test Him!

Look at 18:1-6...

I am always amazed at how people twist these verses to say something about God these verses are not actually saying. That God is hard, inflexible, and lifts people up and puts people down without any consideration for them at all. That is not what these verses are teaching. In fact they are teaching the opposite. They refer to His ability to reshape a vessel that has gone wrong. God is presenting to the people of Judah the opportunity to be reshaped by His sovereign hand, or, if they refuse, to be destroyed by His sovereign hand because He does have the right as the Potter over the Clay.

Their response as indicated in the rest of chapter 18 was to choose to go their own way. In effect, they were saying we really do not believe you have that

authority over us so go ahead do something about it if you think you can. They were putting God to the test. What a foolish response for them to make.

The lesson for us is easy enough to understand, we should not do what they did. Instead, we should recognize God's authority in our life, humble ourselves in His hands, so that we might be vessels of honor fit for the Master's use as it says in 2 Timothy 2:21.

What a better choice that is, than to test the limits of God's authority.

Lesson # 3 – When you're about to be punished, don't make it worst.

In chapter 27, by God's instruction, Jeremiah placed the yoke of an ox around his neck and on his shoulders. This was a huge and heavy burden, as you can imagine. It was to be an illustration of what God was about to do to the people of Judah because of their sins. A yoke of bondage would be placed upon them and they would be carried away as captives by Babylon.

Jeremiah used this illustration with the leaders of Judah to warn them of coming judgment and to present them with two options. He said the captivity will occur but it can go easier or be more difficult. The easiest thing to do is turn you over to them accepting God's punishment. The worst thing to do is resist, because you will still be taken captive, but the punishment will be more severe.

Well, in chapter 28, Hananiah, a false prophet, said just the opposite. He said there would be no captivity, that Babylon would be destroyed, and took the wooded yoke from Jeremiah and broke it. But look what God said in verse 13...

The bondage would be much worst.

I've always been kind of dumb. I know that's a terrible thing to admit but when you hear my story you will agree. Growing up, sometimes I misbehaved to the point of punishment from my dad. My dad's punishment was always the same; he took off his belt and whipped me. It always hurt. One time I was so rebellious, after my whipping I looked at him and said,

“That didn’t hurt!” He then made sure it did. I learned from that experience that in the future when I was being punished not to make it worst.

That was the situation with Judah. They deserved and needed punishment. The best thing for them to do was accept it. But they resisted and made it worst.

The lesson for us is not to do what they did, but to accept God’s punishment as from the hand of a loving Father. Hebrews 12:5-7 teaches that God never punishes for our harm but for our good, and so the best response is to do is humble ourselves, and accept His punishment.

Lesson # 4 – When God’s Word is in black and white, don’t disregard it!

In chapter 36 an incident takes place which send chills through us. God instructed Jeremiah to write down all the words of his prophecy, so it would be in black and white. Then he was to have it read at the Temple. Eventually it was brought to the king’s attention and read for him as well. Look at what happened in verses 21-24...

The first few times I read this passage I thought it taught they so hated God’s Word they sought to destroy it as many throughout history have sought to do. Of course, they could not, God simply instructed Jeremiah to write the words again. All who have ever sought to destroy God’s Word have been frustrated in the same way. God protects and preserves His Word.

But the real message here is different and even more chilling. It was not that they so hated it they sought to destroy it, but that they so disregarded God’s Word they were left unmoved by it, verse 24, *“Yet they were not afraid.”* When God’s Word was read to them it did nothing for them. That’s what should frighten us the most.

When God’s Word is read to us and explained to us, does it do anything for us, are we moved by it?

God’s Word is said to be sharper than any two-edged sword, getting right down into the private matters of our lives (Hebrews 4:12), so when we hear it, do we feel its work taking place in our lives or not?

The lesson for us is to not be as they were, but instead to allow God's Word to have its intended effect in our lives.

The thing that is shocking to me is that this king's dad was Josiah. In 2 Kings 22, when he heard God's Word, revival broke out in the land starting with him. But here, his son Jehoiakim was left unmoved.

James 1:22-25 warns us to be doers of the Word and not just hearers. We are to hear, be moved, and make the appropriate changes.

Lesson # 5 – When you ask for godly counsel, don't reject it!

In chapter 39, according to Jeremiah's prophecy, the nation of Judah fell into the hands of Babylon, and Jerusalem was destroyed. In the chapters following that we read of what took place after the fall. Most were killed or taken captive, but a small remnant was left in the land. Look what they did in 42:1-6...

They went to Jeremiah and asked him to seek the Lord's advice, and promised to do whatever He said. Now look at 43:1-2 and 4...

They sought God's advice, promised to obey, but then refused to do it.

Many times people have come to me for godly counsel. Too many times I have had people leave my office upset with me because I did not tell them what they wanted to hear. You see, they really were not looking for God's counsel, they already knew what they wanted to do; they were only seeking a stamp of approval.

That's what happened to Jeremiah. They came seeking God's counsel through him, they promised to obey, but they had already made up their minds on what they were going to do. They were only seeking Jeremiah's approval.

The lesson for us is not to do that. Proverbs 12:15 teaches, "*The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.*" If we ask for godly counsel and receive it, the worst thing we can do is reject it, we need to receive it.

Lesson # 6 – When God punishes His people, don't think He will ignore you!

In chapters 46 through the rest of the book we find nation after nation named where God instructed Jeremiah to prophesy against them. They are all nations that surrounded Judah at the time, including Egypt and Babylon.

Here's what they were thinking. When they saw the nation of Judah destroyed they laughed at them. They didn't realize God holds everyone accountable.

The lesson for us is not to do the same thing. When we see someone suffering because of sin the worst thing we can do is laugh, and say they deserve it, or to say, "*I'm glad I'm not like that person.*" That's not what we are supposed to do. When we do that we forget we are also accountable to God. What we need to do is response in two ways: (1) Galatians 6:1 tells us to help restore them, remembering we too are vulnerable to sin. (2) 1 Peter 4:17 tell us judgment begins with God's own people. The fact is all are accountable to God. We must never forget this.

As a parent I learned that whenever I pointed out a bad example to my children and warned them not to do the same or they would reap the same consequence that was basically all I could do. It was then up to them to decide weather they wanted to learn from the example or learn first hand. That's where you and I now find ourselves. We can learn from the bad example of Judah, or we can learn our lessons first hand. How much better it is to humble ourselves, learn the lessons of God's Word, and appropriate them in our lives.