

“Amen! Come quickly, Lord Jesus!”

Last Judgment Sunday
3rd to Last Sunday of the Church Year
November 7, 2010
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church
Hecla, SD

Text: Jeremiah 26:1-6 ***In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came from the LORD, saying, “Thus says the LORD: ‘Stand in the court of the LORD’s house, and speak to all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in the LORD’s house, all the words that I command you to speak to them. Do not diminish a word. Perhaps everyone will listen and turn from his evil way, that I may relent concerning the calamity which I purpose to bring on them because of the evil of their doings.’ And you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the LORD: “If you will not listen to Me, to walk in My law which I have set before you, to heed the words of My servants the prophets whom I sent to you, both rising up early and sending them (but you have not heeded), then I will make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth.””***

Theme: PREPARING FOR JUDGMENT DAY

- Prepared by faithful preaching
- Prepared by listening
- Prepared by the grace of God

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ Jesus,

How many of you have been involved with planning a wedding? I imagine most of you over the age of 20 have in one way or another been involved. Maybe it was your wedding, maybe it was your child’s wedding, or maybe you were involved with the wedding of one of your friends. If you’ve ever been involved with planning a modern wedding, you know that it takes a great deal of preparation. The wedding dress, the bridesmaid dresses, the tuxes, the church, the preacher, the day, the time, the hymns, and of course, don’t forget the guest list. Weddings are an important day and a lot of preparing goes into that day - especially for the bride. This is a day she has been dreaming of her whole life and she wants to be ready for it.

Scripture sometimes refers to the Church as the bride and Jesus is her Bridegroom. Jesus has chosen the believers to be His lifelong companion. He loves her and cares for her. He died for His bride to save her and to cleanse her from all her sin. There is a Day that is coming when we will get to meet our Bridegroom face to face. Like the modern bride who wants to be ready for her groom on their wedding day, so too we want to be prepared to meet our Savior Jesus on Judgment Day.

Could there be any more important day than this in our lives? The Day that our lives in this earth come to an end and eternity begins. On that Day Jesus will return surrounded

by His holy angels to judge the living and the dead. The trumpet will sound, the dead will rise, Jesus will separate His believers from the unbelievers, and the believers will be taken to be with their Lord forever in heaven and the unbelievers will be banished from the presence of God forever to the eternal fires of hell. As important as that Day is, how much time do we spend preparing for it? Jesus exhorts us again and again in the Scriptures to be watchful and alert for that day, because it will come when we least expect it!

Today's text from Jeremiah helps identify things that are very important in preparing for Judgment Day. We hear how faithful preaching of God's Word is important to being prepared. We hear how actually listening to God's Word is so very important. But above all else, the grace of God is paramount to being prepared for Judgment Day. May God help us to listen to His Word and so may He prepare us for the Last Day when the trumpet shall sound and we will be with the Lord forever!

PREPARED BY FAITHFUL PREACHING

The Old Testament scriptures are full of events that were a foreshadowing of things to come in the New Testament era. For instance all of the prescribed sacrifices in the Old Testament were a picture of the one great sacrifice Jesus would make on the cross for the sins of the world. The fact that King David was a shepherd king, was a picture of Jesus, the King of kings, who is our Good Shepherd. So too with the judgment prophesied of in our text. Here, God is threatening to destroy Judah, Jerusalem, and Solomon's temple because of the evil which the people were doing. While they did come to the Temple to worship, their hearts were far from Him - they were also worshiping other false gods.

Much like the people of Samuel's day thought of the Ark of the Covenant as a good luck charm, the people of Jeremiah's day thought of the Temple as their ultimate defense. Certainly, they thought, God would not allow anything to harm His Temple. They were wrong. God is threatening to do to Jerusalem and the Temple what He allowed to happen to Shiloh, where the tabernacle had been in the days of Eli and his wicked sons, but by Jeremiah's day was just a pile of rubble. This was the calamity that awaited the people of Judah because of the evil of their doings.

And yet, what do we find the merciful, gracious, and longsuffering God doing? While they may have deserved to be destroyed right then and there, we see that the LORD does not desire the death of the wicked, but that he should turn from his way and live! (Ez. 33:11) And because the LORD desires this He sends his servants the prophets. He says in verse 5 that they rose up early and were sent. This rising up early is something we do when we have something very important we want to accomplish on a given day. So too with the prophets of the LORD. They were sent with a great deal of urgency.

But if these servants of the LORD were to do any good they had to be faithful. The LORD said to Jeremiah, ***“Stand in the court of the LORD's house, and speak to all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in the LORD's house, all the words that I command you to speak to them. Do not diminish a word.”*** The LORD knew exactly what the people needed to hear. They needed a heavy dose of the Law. But in order for this message to get to the people, the LORD needed His servants the prophets to speak His word faithfully. Their audience could not afford for them to be politically correct and only tell them what they wanted to hear. For the sake of their audience they dare not

diminish or hold back a single word from the LORD.

As the Apostle Paul was saying his tearful goodbyes to the elders from the church in Ephesus, he said, **“I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.”** (Acts 20:26-27) Paul did not diminish a word of the Lord, but taught the Ephesians everything Christ had commanded him. This is the will of the LORD when it comes to the preaching of His Word. He requires that His Word be proclaimed faithfully. In Deuteronomy 12 the LORD says, **“Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.”** (Deut 12:32)

As we prepare for Judgment Day, we too need faithful preachers who will proclaim to us the entire counsel of God. We need faithful preachers who will not simply tell us what we want to hear, but what we need to hear. When we sin and begin to wander from God, we need faithful preachers who will not diminish a word but tell us exactly what God has to say about our lives and conduct. We need them to rise early and urgently, while it is still day, before the trumpet sounds and it is too late to repent. Only the Word of God, faithfully taught in its truth and purity, can begin to prepare us for the return of Jesus.

PREPARED BY LISTENING

Children, have your parents ever talked to you about the difference between hearing and listening? Husbands, how many times have you confessed to your wife that you heard what they said but you weren't really listening to what they had to say? There is a big difference between hearing and listening. Hearing is something you can do passively. You can hear someone talking without paying attention to anything they have to say. Listening, though, is active. Listening involves paying attention to the words being spoken and taking them to heart.

When the LORD sent Jeremiah to the Temple with His message and told Him not to diminish a word, what was the LORD's goal? What did the LORD hope to accomplish through Jeremiah? Verse 3, **“Perhaps everyone will listen and turn from his evil way, that I may relent concerning the calamity which I purpose to bring on them because of the evil of their doings.”** Now, how many people do you suppose HEARD the message from the LORD that Jeremiah proclaimed and how many LISTENED? We know many HEARD Jeremiah, because after he spoke these words of Judgment in the Temple, the crowd seized him and wanted to kill him. But few, if any LISTENED. They did not listen to these words of warning from the LORD. The LORD was hoping they would listen and their lives would show that they listened as they turned from their evil way.

As we prepare for Judgment Day are we merely hearing or are we listening? Faithful preaching of God's Word means little if there is no one to preach to or if, like Jeremiah, no one is listening to what God has to say. Listening means we are actively paying attention to God's Word. When God confronts us about our sin in His Word, listening means repenting and turning from our evil way. This is God's purpose when He brings us His Law. It is to lead us to repent of our sins and to believe on Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins.

We begin to see, then, how faithful use of the Means of Grace is so important to preparing ourselves for Judgment Day. Right now, we are preparing for Judgment Day by listening to God's Word and applying it to our lives. Our communicant members were

preparing for Judgment Day by examining themselves before they come to the Lord's Table later in the service. We prepare for Judgment Day by listening to God's Word, repenting of our evil ways, and look to Jesus for forgiveness.

PREPARED BY THE GRACE OF GOD

Yet will any of this be able to truly prepare us to stand before the judgment seat of Christ on the Last Day? Do any of us really think that when Jesus appears we can tell Him that we deserve to go to heaven because we had a faithful preacher and we listened to His Word every Sunday? None of our works, no matter how great we may think it is, no matter how much praise we receive from men, are able to make us stand in the day of Judgment. Our sins are too great. Even if we had only stumbled in one point of the Law, we are guilty of all. (James 2:10)

There is only one thing that can truly prepare us for Judgment Day - the grace of God. The grace of God is His undeserved love toward us sinners. It was the grace of God that led the Son of God to become Man and be our Substitute under the Law. It was the grace of God that punished His innocent Son on the cross to free us from our guilt. It is the grace of God that forgives all our sins for Jesus' sake. It is the grace of God that called us to faith in Jesus and adopted us as His children. By His grace we can stand before the judgment seat of Christ forgiven and cleansed. By His grace through faith in Christ we are declared righteous in God's sight. And it is this undeserved love of God toward us sinners that truly prepares us for Judgment Day.

Until that Day comes, when we shall meet our Bridegroom Jesus, there is much preparation we must do. We need preachers who will not diminish the Word of God but prepare us to meet Jesus by preaching it faithfully. We need to make use of the Gospel in Word and Sacrament regularly. We need to listen to His Word and keep it by repenting of our sins and believing on Jesus for the forgiveness of sin. But above all else, we need the grace of God. It is Jesus in His undeserved love who gets His bride, the Church, ready for that Last, great Day. ***“Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.”*** (Eph 5:25-27) Jesus is coming quickly, may God help each one of us to stay alert and watchful for that day! Amen.