

“Through the Bible in a Year with Pastor Don and the FBC Family”

December 12, 2016

Jeremiah 21:1-24:10. Messages against kings and false prophets.

Romans 3:21–31. Justified by faith in Christ.

Proverbs 18:1–24. The power of words; patience and forgiveness.

COMMENTS.

Jeremiah 21:1-24:10. There are at least three parts to this reading. *First*, there are messages against Judah’s final kings (**21:1-23:8**). Zedekiah sent messengers to Jeremiah in hopes that the Lord might miraculously deliver Jerusalem from the Babylonian armies. The Lord declared that He was fighting with the Babylonians and would not rescue the city. Jerusalem would be ravaged by plague, famine, and sword. Zedekiah and the city’s survivors would be handed over to the Babylonians. Those who wished to escape the slaughter should surrender to Nebuchadnezzar immediately lest they be slaughtered. The Lord reminded the king of his obligation to promote justice, warning that a failure in this regard would bring severe consequences. *Second*, we have the denunciation of the false prophets who failed to denounce evil and promised the people peace and security (**23:9-40**)—as so many contemporary prosperity churches are wont to do. *Third*, the object lesson of the Two Baskets of Figs (**24:1-10**). He showed the prophet two baskets, one filled with tasty figs and the other with inedible ones. The good figs represented those already exiled in Babylon. The Lord would care for them and eventually restore the exiles to the land. The bad figs represented Jehoiachin’s successor Zedekiah, his officials, those who remained in Jerusalem, and those who had gone to Egypt. They would experience humiliation and eventual destruction.

Life in God by second person proper knowledge and proper love. Not only would God refuse to deliver the city from the enemy. He would fight with the enemy and bring about Jerusalem’s defeat! Judah’s military might would be ineffective against the Chaldean army. Whereas in the past, God’s mighty “outstretched arm” and “strong hand” had worked for His people, now He would work against them, because the nation had turned against God. “To the faithful, You show Yourself faithful ... but to the crooked You show Yourself shrewd” (Ps. 18:25–26). It may seem strange that the Lord would use words like “anger,” “fury,” and “great wrath” (**Jer. 21:5**) to describe His disposition toward His own people. Yet these words were a part of His covenant with the people, and the nation knew the terms of the covenant (Deut. 29:23, 28; 32:16–17, 21, 29; Lev. 26:27–28). God had warned the Jews repeatedly that their disobedience would arouse His anger and force Him to bring judgment to the land, but the leaders wouldn’t listen. They preferred dead idols to the living God, and power politics to simple faith in His Word. They preferred to live for *kosmos diabolicus* and put hope in political saviors than life in God *by proper knowledge and proper love*. This same type of cancer afflicts much of American Christianity as reflected by an obsession and passion for politics and prosperity (cf., the prosperity movement) that exceeds passion for whole truth, the total truth of realism in general, and a passion for the Lord Jesus Christ and the spiritual life in particular. An objector might respond by pointing out that God’s judgment on Judah cannot be extrapolated to apply to the United States of America. True enough. Judah is

God's nation in a way that the United States is not. His relationship with Judah includes a written contract, a covenant. However, I would respond to my objector by asking him to consider the Laodicean church in Revelation 3:14-22, which was guilty of self-sufficiency, mammonism, and relegating Christ and the spiritual life to the peripheral. Note that Christ promised judgment on the local churches of that "Gentile" area. But they did not listen, and they were disciplined by the Lord. What form did the judgment take? The church was removed and mosques ended up taking their places, which is exactly what is happening at an increasing rate all over the world, especially in Europe as beautiful, dead, and empty churches are being converted to mosques. Consider the diminishing number of believers who even attend a local church in our country. How does this compare to the healthy Early Church in the Bible? *Acts 2:46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.* In sum, the Lord promised the believers of the Laodicean churches that He would remove the lampstand unless they repented. We know from history, the light of Christianity and its creed were replaced by the darkness of Islam and its creed that "there is no God but God and Muhammad is His prophet." What is in store for Christ's neglected churches in America that were once beacons of light and truth? Only God knows. Unfortunately, even if there were no local churches in America, it would not make any difference in the lives of many, if not most, American Christians—a fact that is more than a bit bizarre in light of Christ and the Christianity we find in the New Testament. There appears to be a huge fundamental gap between fundamental principles of American Christianity and what we find in our epoch. These gaps far exceed the interstices that many imagine.

Romans 3:21–31. The gravity of man's situation is summarized in 3:23: "*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" God thus has provided a righteousness for unrighteous people through the atonement of Jesus Christ. The way of forgiveness and freedom has been offered to all, Jews and Gentiles, through the sacrificial death of Christ. Justified is a legal term meaning to declare righteous. On the basis of what Christ has accomplished for sinners on the cross, God now views those who believe in Christ from an eschatological perspective. That is, He sees them not as they are but as they will be in Christ. He sees them as He sees Christ: perfect, holy, and without sin (compare 2 Cor 5:21). God's justification of those who believe is provided "freely by his grace" (3:24). Grace points to God's free and unmerited favor by which believers have a righteous standing in His sight because of the work of Christ on the Cross.

Life in God by second person proper knowledge and proper love. Verse 22 speaks of the "*righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference.*" Faith is only as good as its object. All men trust something if only themselves; but the Christian trusts Christ. Law righteousness is a reward for works. Gospel righteousness is a gift through faith. Many people say, "I trust in God!" But this is not what saves us. It is personal, individual faith in Jesus Christ that saves and justifies the lost sinner. Even the demons believe in God and tremble, yet this does not save them (James 2:19). Although it is true that *one* act of faith insures irrevocable salvation, the Christian life of trust in Christ is not one that begins and ends at salvation. A vital aspect of the Christian life is *a whole life* of trust in Christ. This trust is part of life in Christ by

*proper knowledge and proper love: Philippians 3:8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the **knowledge** of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith. Galatians 2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and **the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.** The goal of proper knowledge of and love for Christ must always be the one perdurable aspects of our lives.*

Proverbs 18:1–24. This reading provides several proverbs about words. The point is that words are often a good index of someone's soul. By paying attention to what a person says (and indeed to how much he or she says), one can determine whether a person is wise or a fool. Words are often the fruit that show the quality of the heart.

Life in God by second person proper knowledge and proper love. In verse 11 we have the proverb, "A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense." Two marks of wisdom are patience and forgiveness. It is childish to be impatient and unforgiving. As Christians, we have been given superhuman directives from the Lord Christ Himself regarding patience and forgiveness. Ephesians 4:30, *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. 32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.* Consider how patience would avoid actualizing the aforementioned bitterness, wrath, clamor, and evil speaking. Consider how our forgiveness is to be modeled after God's. As we have noted in previous studies, failure to forgive is always a choice to withhold Christ's love from others, a most serious offense to the Christian way of life in light of John 13:34-35. What Christ mandates appertains to the essence of authentic Christianity, the only place for an abundant life. By walking with God *in proper knowledge and proper love*, we share in His life and gain a supernatural wisdom, love, and forgiveness that truly is divine.

Life in God by second person proper knowledge and by proper love.

Pastor Don