



February 24, 2019

“Don’t Lose Sight of God”

Jeremiah 37 – 39

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The long-prophesied, tragic result of disobeying God was finally coming to the Jewish people as outlined in Jeremiah 39: the destruction of Jerusalem. This would have been avoidable, but God’s people didn’t heed the warnings of the prophets, so God’s discipline came upon them in the form of the Babylonian army in 586 BC. One sad story in the midst of this scene was that of King Zedekiah of Judah, whose sons were killed in front of him, and whose eyes were gouged out by the order of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. The truth is, Zedekiah had lost his vision long before his were gouged out. The loss of his physical eyes is symbolic of a larger problem; Zedekiah had lost sight of God. In this message, Pastor Gary shares a warning with us about not losing sight of God.

Historical Background

1. Ancient warfare was slow and calculating, and siege warfare was considered to be the most barbaric.
 - a. Attacking forces would try to break through the walls or scale the walls or tunnel under the walls, so the best defense was an impenetrable wall.
 - b. Attacking forces would basically put defending cities on lock-down.
 - c. Attacking forces would build siege ramps to get over the walls, which took a long time to construct.
 - d. Cities tried to be prepared against an enemy attack, by stockpiling food and other resources, as well as excavating tunnels to bring fresh water into the city.

2. The siege lasted 18 months according to [Jeremiah 39:1-2](#), and the people ran out of food, but they still had a source of fresh water.
 - a. In [2 Chronicles 32:1-4](#), we read that King Hezekiah ordered a tunnel be dug to supply fresh water for Jerusalem when Sennacherib attacked the land of

Judah.

- b. The gruesome details about the effects of starvation are found in the book of Lamentations, which is epilogue to the book of Jeremiah.
 - i. [Lamentations 4:4-10](#) - *“Because of thirst the infant’s tongue sticks to the roof of its mouth; the children beg for bread, but no one gives it to them. Those who once ate delicacies are destitute in the streets. Those nurtured in purple now lie on ash heaps. The punishment of my people is greater than that of Sodom,¹ which was overthrown in a moment without a hand turned to help her. Their princes were brighter than snow and whiter than milk, their bodies more ruddy than rubies, their appearance like sapphires. But now they are blacker than soot; they are not recognized in the streets. Their skin has shriveled on their bones; it has become as dry as a stick. Those killed by the sword are better off than those who die of famine; racked with hunger, they water away for lack of food from the field. With their own hands compassionate women have cooked their own children, who became their food when my people were destroyed.”*
3. When the Babylonian army finally broke through the wall of the city, King Hezekiah and his army fled, but they were overtaken on the plains of Jericho.
 - a. [Jeremiah 39:2, 4-5a](#) - *“And on the ninth day of the fourth month of Zedekiah’s eleventh year, the city wall was broken through. ... When Zedekiah king of Judah and all the soldiers saw them, they fled; they left the city at night by way of the king’s garden, through the gate between the two walls, and headed toward the Arabah. But the Babylonian army pursued them and overtook Zedekiah on the plains of Jericho.”*
4. Nebuchadnezzar pronounced sentence on Zedekiah, and his judgment ensured that the last thing he would ever remember seeing was the death of his sons!
 - a. [Jeremiah 39:5b-7](#) - *“They captured [Zedekiah] and took him to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon at Riblah in the land of Hamath, where he pronounced sentence on him. There are Riblah the king of Babylon slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes and bound him with bronze shackles to take him to Babylon.”*
5. Pastor Gary said: “As terrible as this scene is, the truth is that Zedekiah has lost his sight way before this event. He had been blind to a lot of things; primarily the condition of his own heart, and the condition of the heart of the nation of Judah. [They] had forgotten God. You see, the loss of his physical eyes was [symbolic] of the larger issue, [which was that] Zedekiah had lost sight of God. I want us to see in the chapters preceding this event [the things that] happened in Zedekiah’s life.

¹ The sudden and total destruction of Sodom is found in [Genesis 19](#).

What were the mistakes that Zedekiah made that ultimately resulted, not just in the physical loss of sight, but even long before that, the loss of seeing God?"

We Lose Sight Of God

When We Don't Do What God Asks But We Still Want Him To Do What We Ask

6. **Jeremiah 37:1-3** - *"Zedekiah son of Josiah was made king of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; he reigned in place of Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim.² Neither he nor his attendants nor the people of the land paid any attention to the words the LORD had spoken through Jeremiah the prophet. King Zedekiah, however, sent Jehucal son of Shelemiah with the priest Zephaniah son of Maaseiah to Jeremiah the prophet with this message: 'Please pray to the LORD our God for us.' "*
7. Pastor Gary said: "[Zedekiah] didn't want to do what God asked [him to do], yet he had the audacity to send a messenger to Jeremiah to ask Jeremiah to ask something of God on his behalf! ... [This is hypocrisy and duplicity!] Why do we think that when we deliberately disobey God that he is still obligated somehow to come through for us? ... [Zedekiah didn't want to heed the words of the prophet Jeremiah, but he surely wanted God's blessing, favor, and help!] ... I am convinced that God will sometimes deliver us in ways that we clearly don't deserve, and I'm thankful for his mercy, but we must not deceive ourselves into thinking that we can continue to disobey God, but he will bless us anyway. ... When we are not in a right place with God, the only prayers that God hears are prayers of repentance and forgiveness. ... To be in deliberate disobedience to God and still expect him to answer our prayers is not only unrealistic, it's frankly unbiblical. [We don't do what God asks, but we want him to do what we ask.] When [this] sets in we are apt to lose sight of God."
 - a. **Psalm 66:18** - *"If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.*
 - b. **Isaiah 1:15-17a** - *"When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right!"*

We Lose Sight Of God

When Open Faith Becomes Hidden Faith

8. Jeremiah had been warning the people of Judah for about 40 years; judgment is coming if you don't turn from your wicked ways and turn to the Lord, but somehow Zedekiah thought that God's message would change, so he **privately/secretly** sent

² King Zedekiah was essentially a "puppet king," appointed by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.

for Jeremiah. (Emphasis added)

- a. **Jeremiah 37:16-18** - *“Jeremiah was put into a vaulted cell in a dungeon, where he remained a long time. Then King Zedekiah sent for him and had him brought to the palace, where he asked him privately, ‘Is there any word from the LORD?’ ‘Yes,’ Jeremiah replied, ‘you will handed over to the king of Babylon.’ ”*

9. Pastor Gary said: “Zedekiah never wanted to openly identify with God; only privately, secretly, and behind the scenes. The very reason that he had Jeremiah put into a dungeon to begin with, was to silence him. ... He hoped to get a good message from God, but it turned out to be a disappointment because Jeremiah just reiterated what he had been saying [for many] years. ... When I hear people say from time to time, ‘My Christian faith is a private thing,’ that’s code-word for ‘I’m too ashamed to be identified with Christ publicly. ... [That’s not judgmental; it’s factual. When people start to talk about their faith as something that they don’t discuss because [it’s] a private thing, that is code-word for, ‘I don’t want to be publicly identified with Christ.’ ... [I get that in some parts of the world it’s a matter of survival and to the benefit of the Gospel to go underground, but that’s not the case for us today in the United States.] ... Why do we act like we’re living in Saudi Arabia when it comes to our Christian faith? ... Jesus calls us to live a public faith [and] to publicly identify with him.”

- a. **Matthew 5:14-16** - *“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”*
- b. **Matthew 10:33** - *“... whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.”*

We Lose Sight Of God

When We Stop Doing The Right Thing In Favor Of Doing The Popular Thing

10. The men listed at the beginning of this chapter were responsible for encouraging Zedekiah to punish Jeremiah for speaking God’s message to the people of Judah.
- a. **Jeremiah 38:2-10** - [Four of Zedekiah’s officials heard what Jeremiah was saying to the people, and they quoted his remarks:] *“This is what the LORD says: ‘Whoever stays in this city will die by the sword, famine or plague, but whoever goes over to the Babylonians will live. he will escape with his life; he will live.’ And this is what the LORD says: ‘This city will certainly be handed over to the army of the king of Babylon, who will capture it.’ “Then the officials said to the king, ‘This man should be put to death. He is discouraging the soldiers who are left in this city, as well as all the people, by the things he*

is saying to them. This man is not seeking the good of these people but their ruin.' 'He's in your hands,' King Zedekiah answered. 'The king can do nothing to oppose you.' So they took Jeremiah and put him into the cistern of Malkijah, the king's son, which was in the courtyard of the guard. They lowered Jeremiah by ropes into the cistern; it had no water in it, only mud, and Jeremiah sank down into the mud. But Ebed-Melech, a Cushite,³ an official in the royal palace, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern. While the king was sitting in the Benjamin Gate, Ebed-Melech went out of the palace and said to him, 'My lord the king, these men have acted wickedly in all they have done to Jeremiah the prophet. They have thrown him into a cistern, where he will starve to death when there is no longer any bread in the city.' Then the king commanded Ebed-Melech the Cushite, 'Take thirty men from here with you and lift Jeremiah the prophet out of the cistern before he dies.' "

11. Pastor Gary said: “[Zedekiah finally made the decision] to treat Jeremiah properly, but it was only because this one guy, Ebed-Melech, one of the officials in the king’s palace, had enough guts to confront the king about what was going on in town. But what is interesting and sad about Zedekiah in this story, is that he [said] one thing to one group of people and he [said] another thing to another group of people. He [changed] like a chameleon to suit [the] situation. To the first group [he chose not to interfere]. To [Ebed-Melech he changed his mind and decided to do what was right]. ... He catered to the loudest voice... in order to appease the popular voice at the moment. ... We will start to lose sight of God when we stop doing the right thing in favor of the popular thing. Now, sometimes the right thing is the popular thing, and it’s wonderful when those two things line up together, but more and more in our world, the right thing is not often the popular thing and there is usually a personal cost attached to doing the right thing instead of the popular thing, and that’s the reason why some people are reluctant to do the right thing because they don’t want to pay the price that is often attached. Zedekiah didn’t want to pay the price, so he just decided to do the popular thing.”
 - a. God takes note of the times when we do what is right, and that was the case for Ebed-Melech, who received word from the Lord through Jeremiah, that his life would be spared!
 - i. **Jeremiah 39:15-18** - *“While Jeremiah had been confined in the courtyard of the guard, the word of the LORD came to him: ‘Go and tell Ebed-Melech the Cushite, “This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: I am about to fulfill my words against this city through disaster, not prosperity. At that time they will be fulfilled before your eyes. But I will rescue you on that day, declares the LORD; you will not be handed over to those you fear. I will save you; you will*

³ Cush was the ancient name for Ethiopia.

not fall by the sword but will escape with your life, because you trust in me, declares the LORD.” ’ ”

12. Pastor Gary said: “[In our culture today the] things that define right and the things that define wrong have become very blurred. People want to convince you that there’s no such thing as absolute right and absolute wrong. The way the culture is trending is they want you to believe that it’s a very relative thing; it’s a very subjective thing. [The culture wants you to believe that] truth and what is right and what is wrong is [determined by the individual]. ... In large part, the reason is because people don’t want to be accountable to the God of the universe, who defines absolutely what is right and what is wrong. ... This is the phenomenon that is tragically happening in our world today.”

We Lose Sight Of God
When We Are Too Proud To Surrender

13. **Jeremiah 38:17-20** - *“Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, ‘This is what the LORD God Almighty, the God of Israel, says: “If you **surrender** to the officers of the king of Babylon, your life will be spared and this city will not be burned down; you and your family will live. but if you will not **surrender** to the officers of the king of Babylon, this city will be handed over to the Babylonians and they will burn it down; you yourself will not escape from their hands.” King Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, ‘I am afraid of the Jews who have gone over to the Babylonians, for the Babylonians may hand me over to them and they will mistreat me.’ ‘They will not hand you over,’ Jeremiah replied. ‘Obey the LORD by doing what I tell you. Then it will go well with you, and your life will be spared.’ ”* (Emphasis added)
14. Pastor Gary said: “Jeremiah kept telling Zedekiah [to surrender it will go well for you but if you don’t it’s going to be bad.] ... If you’re a king of a nation, the idea of surrender sounds disgraceful... The reality is that Zedekiah was not afraid of surrendering to the Babylonians, the root of his issue is that he was afraid of surrendering to God. He was too proud to surrender to God. ... [Jeremiah kept telling him to] yield to the discipline that God [was] bringing against [him, then things would go better for him]. ... God did not allow the Babylonians to come to disgrace the nation; God allowed the Babylonians to come to discipline the nation, whom he [loved]. There’s a big difference! ... Nine times out of ten we disgrace ourselves because we have not heeded [the Lord’s discipline in advance]. ... If we would just yield, [and] if we would just surrender to the Lord, we [wouldn’t] have to suffer the pain and the agony and the disgrace. ... We will start to lose sight of God when we are too proud to surrender. Zedekiah didn’t have to see his sons slaughtered. ... Instead, because of Zedekiah’s stubborn refusal to surrender and submit to God, he tragically [witnessed] his own sons [being] slaughtered in front

of him, [and he had] his eyes gouged out. ... I wonder what we could avoid if we would just surrender when God is trying to get our attention? ... God loves us too much to allow us to remain as we are, and we can either choose the path of discipline or we can choose the path of resistance. [It will go] far better for us when we humble ourselves under God's merciful hand of discipline, that we might be changed for the better, than to resist God and see how much more difficult our lives [will become]."

a. [Proverbs 13:15](#) - "... *the way of transgressors is hard.*" (KJV)

Discussion Questions

1. Read [Jeremiah 39:1-7](#) to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Provide a brief overview of the historical background and read Pastor Gary's remarks about how Zedekiah's spiritual condition. (See #1 through #5 above)
3. Read and discuss [Jeremiah 37:1-3](#), [Psalm 66:18](#), and [Isaiah 1:15-17a](#). (See #6 and #7a and #7b above)
4. Spend time talking about Pastor Gary's comments about rejecting God's will and still wanting God to bless our will. (See #7 above)
5. Read and discuss [Jeremiah 37:16-18](#). (See #8 above)
6. Allow the people in your group to share examples of the ways their faith was a private matter, and how the Holy Spirit has helped them become more open about their faith.
7. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's remarks about hidden and public faith. (See #9 above)
8. Read and discuss [Matthew 5:14-16](#) and [Matthew 10:33](#). (See #9a and #9b above)
9. Read and discuss [Jeremiah 38:2-10](#). (See #10 above)
10. Allow the people in your group to share experiences they've had when they chose to do the right thing instead of the popular thing.
11. Spend time talking about Pastor Gary's remarks about the courage Ebed-Melech showed and how the Lord rewarded him. (See #11 above)
12. How did the Lord help you and how did he honor your commitment to doing the right thing?

13. Spend time talking about Pastor Gary's comments concerning the swiftly changing culture we live in, which is moving swiftly away from the concept of absolute truth. (See # 12 above)
14. Read and discuss [Jeremiah 38:17-20](#). (See #13 above)
15. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's remarks concerning Zedekiah's unwillingness to surrender his life and humble himself before the Lord. (See #14 above)
16. Close your time in prayer and allow the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984)