

Jeremiah 23:16–29: ¹⁶Thus says the LORD of hosts: “Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD. ¹⁷They say continually to those who despise the word of the LORD, ‘It shall be well with you’; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, ‘No disaster shall come upon you.’”

¹⁸For who among them has stood in the council of the LORD to see and to hear his word, or who has paid attention to his word and listened? ¹⁹Behold, the storm of the LORD! Wrath has gone forth, a whirling tempest; it will burst upon the head of the wicked.

²⁰The anger of the LORD will not turn back until he has executed and accomplished the intents of his heart. In the latter days you will understand it clearly.

²¹“I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied. ²²But if they had stood in my council, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people, and they would have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their deeds.

²³“Am I a God at hand, declares the LORD, and not a God far away? ²⁴Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the LORD. ²⁵I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, ‘I have dreamed, I have dreamed!’ ²⁶How long shall there be lies in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart, ²⁷who think to make my people forget my name by their dreams that they tell one another, even as their fathers forgot my name for Baal? ²⁸Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let him who has my word speak my word faithfully. What has straw in common with wheat? declares the LORD. ²⁹Is not my word like fire, declares the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?”

Faith Lets God Be God

INTRODUCTION

Last week’s message was about how Faith Trusts in Our Trustworthy God. Jesus teaches that as God the Father takes care of the needs of the birds and the flowers and the grass of the field, He will also take care of you, the crown of His creation. Knowing this, faith frees you from worry, fear, and the desire to care for “number one”—and faith frees you to use your resources to serve to God and your neighbor.

Today, I want to talk about another aspect of the gift of faith. Because faith—saving faith in Christ—is trust in the Holy Trinity above all things, faith lets God be God.

Let me explain: Have you ever tried to change someone? Maybe you didn't like his personality or her hair or clothing style, or way he talked—and you felt obliged to change that person. How do people feel about your efforts to change them? Did they appreciate it? Were they resentful? It's true, there are some things we need to change—like bad habits or bad behaviors. But other things simply can't be changed—like the personality that God has given you.

Well, if you don't know someone, you probably have no interest in changing him. But once you get to know someone through conversation and personal interaction, then you start thinking, “It would be nice if she wouldn't talk so much,” or “if he worked a little harder,” or, “if he wasn't so messy,” or “if she lost a little weight.” Only after we get to know someone, do we really think about how he should change for us. But think about that—how often do we really want people to change for themselves? We usually want them to change for us.

Well, did you know that people have been trying to change God since the Garden of Eden? If we didn't know God, we wouldn't really know what to change about Him. But we do know God because God has revealed Himself to us by His work of creation and by His revealed Word. Creation reveals that God is powerful, wise, intelligent, and just plain awesome. But Holy Scripture reveals so much more about God—that He is good, perfect, holy, eternal, just and changeless. Because He is good and holy and just, sin makes God angry. But He is slow to that anger because He is full of love, grace and mercy. That's why Holy Scripture is called holy—it is what the Holy God says about Himself and what He's done in and for creation.

But since the Fall into sin, there's a lot that we'd like to change about God: like maybe make Him a little less judgmental, and a little more open-minded on the subject of sin and hell.

Perhaps it would be nice if God was more open to our lifestyle choices, and not so insistent on repentance. You see, repentance is God's call for us to change—but the sinner wants God to change—so we don't have to!

But, to change God means to change who He is. Since what we know about God is revealed to us in His Word, that means to change God we must change His Word in one fashion or another. So, since the fall into sin, we say with Satan, "Did God really say..."

Did God really say Jesus is the only way to heaven? Did God really say He will punish unrepentant sinners in hell? Did God really say thou shalt not—or was He just making suggestions? Did God really say He created the universe in six days? Did God really say this is my beloved Son—listen to Him? Did God really say baptism now saves you? Did God really say this is my body and my blood?

While unbelief desires to change God into something sinners find more likeable,

FAITH LETS GOD BE GOD—ESPECIALLY WHEN HE SPEAKS THROUGH HIS WORD.

Faith takes God at His Word. Faith trusts God fully in all things. Faith submits to God's authority. When God proclaims His anger at sin, faith doesn't say, "Everything's okay," faith says, "Repent." When God says, "Do this and not that," faith doesn't say, "Did God really say..." faith trusts that God is true and the whole world is the liar.

And because the true and living God is known through His Word, faith seeks out those who teach the Word of God in its truth and purity because faith knows that only the Word of God saves, not the words or imaginations of the human heart.

I. Faith ascertains the will of God through His Revealed Word.

God is angry in our Old Testament reading because He's been misrepresented by those who call themselves prophets of God, but whom God has neither called nor sent: ¹⁶“Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD. ¹⁷They say continually to those who despise the word of the LORD, “It shall be well with you”; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, “No disaster shall come upon you.””

During the time of the prophet Jeremiah, Israel was grievously sinful. Out of His great love for His people, God sent true prophets to call the people to repent, turn from their idols and their sinful way of life—and return to God.

But there were other prophets who claimed to have a vision or a word from God. They filled the people with vain hope, telling them, “Everything is okay—no disaster will come upon you—after all, you're the people of God.” Such words made them popular with the people—but God was not pleased: “I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, ‘I have dreamed, I have dreamed!’ ²⁶How long shall there be lies in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart?”

The false prophets that God condemns in our text didn't receive a message from God, nor did they ascertain His will through His Word. Their “message” came from their own imaginations.

False prophets love their dreams, because you can't prove what happened in another man's dream. You can say all you want, “I had a dream,” and who's to say you didn't. You may have heard of the popular game you play on your cell phone called Pokemon Go. It's known as an augmented reality game which uses your phone's GPS and real world places and then augments that reality with little monsters from the digital world that you capture. Well, a “prophetess”

named Lana is on the augmented reality kick. She recently told at a church in Alabama that she could see a huge magnet that was on fire on top of the church building. She told the congregation that as she drove up to the church, she suddenly saw the magnet became activated to a whole new level of frequency, and she saw people running to the magnet. She asked the Lord what was going on and the Lord told her that people were being attracted to the magnet to receive a fresh impartation. She said that God was birthing something completely new, that this magnet was creating pathways of encounter and pathways of revival to bring refreshing and healing to the nations. Another prophet claimed that she found a green feather in her office which signified she'd been visited by the angel of prosperity which is supposedly a green-colored eagle. What does any of this have to do with Christ and His salvation? In fact, where is Christ in all of this?

II. Faith lets God Speak His Law.

Well, faith listens to God as He speaks in His Word—and doesn't listen to the dreams and imaginations of false prophets. But if you don't believe the Word, God says just wait and see what happens. In our text, the Lord said, “²⁰The anger of the LORD will not turn back until he has executed and accomplished the intents of his heart. In the latter days you will understand it clearly.” History teaches us which of the prophets was correct: Jeremiah or the false prophets. Indeed, it was Jeremiah. As Jeremiah said, the Lord's patience did come to an end and the Babylonians swept the people away because they would not repent. Even though Jeremiah's message was unpleasant and unpopular, it was true for it came from God.

But by trying to change God, man destroyed himself.

The Lord goes on to say, “²²But if they (that is, the false teachers) had stood in my council, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people, and they would have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their deeds.” Indeed, faith lets God be God by listening

and believing when God speaks His Word of wrath so that sinners may be warned and turn from their sin, and live.

The duty of the Church and her pastors today is to stand in the council of God, that is to listen to God as He speaks through His Word, and to teach that Word faithfully both within and outside of the walls of the church so that the world may know God's will. Will that message be popular? Will that message be pleasant? Not to those hearts that want to change God.

But salvation doesn't happen when we try to change God—it only happens when God changes us. And that's what the Word of God does. God says His Word is like a fire, like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces—a fire that sweeps sin away, a hammer that breaks the sinfully hard heart.

III. Faith Lets God Speak His Gospel.

Faith knows that God doesn't speak His Word of Law in order to condemn, but that sinners may be saved. God desires not the death of any person, but that people turn from their sinful ways and live. Thus, the Holy Scriptures teach us that the name of God is a holy and saving name. But in our text, the Lord wrath waxes hot against the false prophets who tried to get the people to forget the name of God. The Name of God is everything God wants us to know about Him. To forget the name of God is to forget God. What happens then is that the people follow the prophet—and not God.

Baptism is special and saves because God puts His name on you and calls you His own. But knowing who God truly is, is only possible because God has given you Jesus, the ultimate revelation of who God is. Of His name, Scripture says, “there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12).

As faith lets God be God in terms of the Law, faith also lets God be God in terms of the Gospel. Faith acknowledges that there is no way we can save ourselves by works of our hands or by the imaginations of our hearts. Only Jesus can restore God's name in us—and give us saving faith in the one, true God.

In Jesus, God identified Himself with humanity. In Jesus, God came down to be with you. In Jesus, God stretched out His hands on the cross to suffer and die for you.

In Jesus, you have the faith that saves you because it trusts God when He speaks—who He calls you to repent and when He forgives your sins. Faith saves because it doesn't try to change God—it lets God change you— it lets God be God!

In Jesus' Name. Amen.