

The Word of the Lord Remains

Reformation Sun. – 10/31/21 – Mt. Calvary Luth.
Jeremiah 36:1-4, 20-23, 29-32 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 3 [The LORD expresses His desire, and the purpose of His Word,] **“It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the disaster that I intend to do to them, so that every one may turn from his evil way, and that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin.”**

Introduction

✘ I suspect we all know something about paper shredders. There are small and inexpensive units that shred only a few pages at a time and others that are large and expensive commercial machines; able to shred millions of pages per hour. Regardless of the size, make, or model, their purpose is still the same – to destroy documents so that they lose their original intention of storing and conveying information for us to read and understand and use.

I. Satan Shreds God’s Word and our Lives.

✘ Today, on Reformation Day, we meet Mr. Paper Shredder himself – King Jehoiakim. Now be honest with me folks, before you heard our Old Testament Reading this morning, how many of you could tell us anything about King Jehoiakim except that he was one of the kings in the Bible?

→ Last week, I spent three days at a Pastors’ Conference, where our guest speaker was the Rev. Dr. Reed Lessing, an LCMS professor who is an expert on the book of Jeremiah. As he took us on a whirlwind trip through the main themes of what God inspired Jeremiah to record for us, he helped us grow in our appreciation of this often overlooked book in God’s inspired and inerrant Word.

✘ It is Dr. Lessing’s idea to think of King Jehoiakim as a shredder of God’s Word which I’m using as a main idea for this message today. In verse 23 of our text we hear this, “As Jehudi read three or four columns, the king [Jehoiakim] would cut them off (from the scroll) with a knife”. The *Js* here are wild! *Jehudi* is in *Judah* of *Jerusalem* in 604 BC reading *Jeremiah* while *Jehoiakim* shreds it with his knife!

→ We use paper shredders to destroy bills, credit cards, bank statements, and other sensitive documents. But in this text Jehoiakim shreds God’s Word! Who in their right mind would cut up and shred God’s Word? Especially God’s Word in Jeremiah?

→ Since Jeremiah’s book included God’s word of judgement against Jehoiakim and the people of Judah because they had grown lazy and negligent in their faith, I suppose we could see why Jehoiakim might be tempted to cut it up and burn it; sort of like the old saying, “Out of sight, out of mind”. “If I burn up the scroll with God’s Law against me, then somehow that might mean that God will forget about it; that I won’t have to worry about my sins and the countless ways that I ignore Him.” This really was Jehoiakim “thumbing his nose at God”. Pretty gutsy!

✘ But, Jeremiah’s book was all Law and judgment. Still, it has a lot more Gospel than most people might think. Listen here to a few examples of the Gospel in Jeremiah; all of them declarations from God to His people:

→ Jer. 23:5-6, “I will raise up for David a righteous Branch and He shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In His days, Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell in safety. And this is the name by which He will be called, the Lord is our righteousness”.

→ Jer. 29:11, “I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to give you *shalom* (peace) and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future”.

- Jer. 31:3, “I have loved you with an everlasting love”.
- Jer. 31:13, “Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy; I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow”.
- Jer. 31:34, “I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more”.
- ⊗ Even as he heard of God’s desire to love and forgive and restore and save him and the people of Judah, Jehoiakim still shredded and burned those promises. What could ever have possessed him to shred God’s Word?
 - You know...so do I. This is the work of *the* Paper Shredder. We don’t know him by that name though. Instead, we know him by the names attached to him in Scripture; the names of Liar, Deceiver, Destroyer, Devil, Serpent, and Satan. Satan doesn’t want us or anyone to have delight in God’s Word ... power in God’s Word ... hope in God’s Word ... life in God’s Word forgiveness in God’s Word. And so Satan shreds God’s Word in the hearts and minds of people every chance he gets.
- ⊗ Want some proof? A recent George Barna survey of *Christians* (those who claim to be believers) found these stunning results: 58% didn’t know who preached the Sermon on the Mount. 52% didn’t know that the Book of Jonah is in the Bible. 70% didn’t know that the quote “God helps those who help themselves” is *not* in the Bible. And 15% agreed that the Gospels are Matthew, Mark, *Luther*, and John.
 - Those are all relatively superficial issues. But here’s a serious question: Why does Satan shred God’s Word? Answer: So that he can shred our lives!
 - Satan meets us in the morning and says, “This day is hopeless; just go back to bed”. And in the bathroom, he says, “You’re ugly. How could anyone love you?” At the end of the day, he says, “You are a sorry excuse for a Christian. God doesn’t want you!” And without God’s Word to push back against these lies; if we are not “living” in His Word as Jesus calls us to do in our Gospel Reading today (Jn. 8:31), then Satan easily chews us up and spits us out.

II. The Church Shredded the Word to Silence Luther.

- ⊗ Martin Luther knew all about this. In our closing hymn today, “*A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*,” he wrote, “The old satanic foe, has sworn to work us woe. With craft and dreadful might, he arms himself to fight. On earth he has no equal” (*LSB* 657:1). That’s why Luther embraced God’s Word – full throttle, especially Paul’s letter to the Romans, where he says for example in verses 23-24 of our Epistle Reading today, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rm. 3:23–24).
 - Or in couple more places in Romans, such as chapter 4:25, “[Jesus] was delivered over to death for our sins and raised again for our justification”. And chapter 5:1, “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”.
- ⊗ But in Luther’s day there was *another* paper shredder – the medieval Roman Catholic Church! In 1517, an archbishop named Albert of Brandenburg had the goal of silencing Luther. Why?
 - Well, Albert was selling indulgences to pay off his debt to the pope. What’s an indulgence? The pope taught that indulgences – a simple piece of paper purchased by people and signed by the pope – would lessen a person’s time in purgatory.

- Luther though had publicly posted 95 Theses saying that indulgences were bogus. And because people began to believe Luther instead of the church, that meant that Albert was out big bucks! So the church said that God's Word of truth must be shredded!
- ✘ As the conflict grew, in July 1519, a debate was held in Leipzig, Germany. John Eck promoted the Roman Catholic position – that people are saved, in large part, by what they do. Luther still wouldn't budge on salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, for Christ's sake alone.
 - After the debate, Pope Leo X excommunicated Luther and declared him to be a heretic because he would not come in line with the church's popular teaching. The statement of excommunication began with these words from Ps. 80:13, "Arise, O Lord, a wild boar has invaded your vineyard". Who was the wild boar invading the church's vineyard? They believed it was Martin Luther! So the Pope and his church acted to silence and shred God's Word, taught by Luther!
- ✘ Everything came to a head at an imperial assembly in Worms, Germany. On April 17, 1521, the Roman Catholic Church demanded that Luther recant (say that he was wrong). Luther asked for one night to think about it. Then, on April 18, Martin announced, "My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant! Here I stand!"
 - That's the point of 1 Peter 1:25 that says, "the word of the Lord remains forever". In other words, the Bible and its truths do not change in order to fit in with whatever philosophies or ideals or agendas or motivations might be popular or demanded or believed from one time to another. What was truth at the very beginning of time and throughout history when God revealed it to His prophets and Gospel writers is still the very same truth today, and will be "forever".

III. The Word that Remains announces grace, hope...in Christ

- ✘ Luther received his courage, spine, and conviction from the central teaching in God's Word – Christ crucified for sinners. "Christ crucified" means every one of God's promises in Jeremiah is now yours and mine as well. Christ is your righteousness. Christ has plans to give you hope and a future. Christ loves you with an everlasting love. Because of Christ crucified, God changes our mourning into joy and our sorrow into gladness. And because of Christ crucified, God now forgives our iniquity and remembers our sin no more.
 - How is all of this possible? Because a Roman governor named Pontius Pilate gave Jesus over to professional shredders. Those Roman soldiers ripped up and shredded skin from our Savior's back; preparing Him for the biggest, most industrial-grade shredder of the day. The Romans called it *Mors turpissima crucis*, which is Latin for "the utterly vile death on a cross". The cross was the "shredder" of their day. Their intent, when they crucified Jesus, was to destroy Him; to stop the spread of His message. And they thought that they did that when He died and was buried.
- ✘ But we know better don't we? In verse 32 we're told, "Then Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to Baruch...who wrote on it at the dictation of Jeremiah all the words of the scroll that Jehoiakim king of Judah had [shredded and] burned in the fire. And many similar words were added to them." Let me repeat the last line. "And many similar words were added to them!"
 - It's as if God through Jeremiah said to them, "If you mess with My sermon; complain about My words of truth then the next time I'll add to it!" God, through His Spirit resurrected Jeremiah's scroll – and then some!
- ✘ His scroll ultimately served as the prelude to another resurrected scroll – and then some! Jesus, the Word made flesh, rose again. What do we call that? Easter! The first witnesses to Jesus'

resurrected life were beside themselves. Mary cried out, “Rabboni!” The Emmaus disciples exclaimed, “Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked to us on the road?” And Thomas confessed, “My Lord and my God!”

→ Sceptics and unbelievers; those who don't like what God's Word might say about their sinful desires or the world's warped agendas might try to shred His truth either physically or figuratively through rhetoric or their protests or their attempts at shaming it with their accusations, but God's Word; His truth will still remain, just as it did in Jeremiah's day and when Jesus rose in victory over sin, death and devil!

✘ Remember, Luther helped us understand that God's Word includes both His Law and His Gospel. A lot of what Jeremiah recorded at God's command was His Law, holding the people and the king accountable for shredding God's Word in their sinful actions and false beliefs. But as verse three tells us, this is the purpose of God's Law, that “it may be that the house of Judah will hear all the disaster that I intend to do to them...” because of their sin.

→ For what intended goal though? It's God's ultimate desire for all people in every day and age. Verse three continues, “so that every one may turn from his evil way, and that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin”.

✘ That's why God's Word remains forever; as Jesus says in our Gospel Reading, John 8:36, so that through the Son, “you will be free indeed”.

→ God's Word remains for you, right now; announcing forgiveness for all your sin; showering you with grace; rekindling your hope for everlasting life.

→ Wherever His Word is preached, studied, read, and memorized, it has that power; His victorious power over every satanic force that seeks to destroy its Holy Spirit power.

Conclusion

✘ In Luther's day the motto of the Reformation came out of 1 Peter 1:25, “The word of the Lord remains forever”. It was a Latin phrase, *Verbum Dei Manet in Aeternum*.

→ In fact they sewed the four letters for that motto, VDMA on their coat sleeves and cloaks with a cross in their midst. We've placed a sample of that symbol inside the cover of our bulletin this morning.

✘ It remains our motto today as Lutherans. It is a reminder to all Paper Shredders out there that want to destroy or ignore God's Word. We boldly confess, “*Verbum Dei Manet in Aeternum*”, “The word of the Lord remains forever. Here we stand” on Christ alone. Amen.