

A MESSAGE TO A REBELLIOUS NATION
Jeremiah 9:23, 24

Intro: If you were reading through the prophecy of Jeremiah to mark verses you would like to come back to some day to memorize, I would be surprised if you could pass over these two verses: Jer. 9:23, 24. They are verses which tell us (1) what the Lord does not like, and (2) what He does like. I memorized these years ago, when I was in my 20's, and I never get tired of reading them, or thinking about them. (Quote.)

They are verses which you can lift out of their context, and still they have a very important message for everyone.

BUT, as I have been trying to point out in this series, these verses take on an even richer and more important meaning when they are considered in the light of their context.

What is their context, i.e., what led up to these verses, and what followed?

It will only take you a minute to answer that question. Just read a few verses before verse 23 in chapter 9, and then read the last two verses of the chapter which follow verse 24.

The theme is judgment. Prophets were preachers of judgment. They were raised up when the Lord was preparing to deal with His people, or some other nation, because of their sins. But right in among all of the judgments which Jeremiah was declaring, the Lord told Jeremiah to say this. And will you note that Jeremiah made it very clear that these were the Lord's words, and not His own. Although Jeremiah used those words, "Thus saith the Lord," over and over, we must never read over them as though they were unimportant. Of course, Jeremiah's prophecy was the Word of God, but that phrase is inserted many times throughout his prophecy so we will not treat Jeremiah's message as coming from him, but from the Lord!

It is easy to come up with an outline for these two verses.

- 1) Verse 23 tells us what the people were not to do, especially three certain groups of people. However, this was to be a warning to all of the people.
- 2) Verse 24 tell us what the Lord wanted the people to do, and why.

Let us consider them in the order in which Jeremiah gave them to the people of Judah so long ago.

I. WHAT THE PEOPLE WERE NOT TO DO (Jer. 9:23).

Before we look at the verse itself, let me call your attention to the context again.

Jeremiah was not speaking at the evening service of the Trinity Bible Church in Jerusalem. He was not speaking to people who wanted to hear the Word of God. He was speaking to people who wanted to kill him because he was telling them that judgment was ahead for them because of the many ways in which they were grieving the Lord. They were people who had not learned anything from the fact that Israel had been taken into captivity. In fact, the Lord told them that they were worse than the Israelites were. They were Baal worshippers. They sacrificed their children. They were involved in all kinds of sin. They failed to give God the glory for all of the good things that had happened to them in the past. They did not glory in the fact that they were the people of God. So it was far different from our circumstances here tonight. I hope that it can be said of all of us that we do love the Lord, and that we do want to please Him, and that we are grateful for anyone who can teach us more about the Lord and His will for our lives. We love to hear the Word. But the people of Judah did not want to hear the Word. They were a people intent on doing what they wanted to do.

But now what does this verse tell us.

It tells us that when the Lord's people, or anyone else, turn away from the Lord, they no longer find their delight in the Lord. They find their delight, their pleasure, in other things. What other things? Jeremiah mentioned three things here:

- 1) Wisdom.
- 2) Might.
- 3) Riches.

Jeremiah told the people that they were not to glory in any of these three things.

The verb glory actually appears five times in these two verses, and it is always the same word in the Hebrew. It is actually the same Hebrew word from which we get the well-known Bible word, Hallelujah! It speaks of that which we boast about, or that which we are proud of. It is that which makes us happy, and causes us to want to sing.

It is a verb which, as verse 24 shows us, should describe how we feel about the Lord. But the people of Judah were not rejoicing in the Lord; they rejoiced, i.e., those who could, in their wisdom, their might, and their riches. These things were not only their great delight, but they were their security. They felt safe with their wisdom, their power, and

their riches.

Let look, first of all, at:

A. "Wisdom" (v. 23).

We have several books in the OT which are called, Wisdom Books. And all through the Bible wisdom is commended to the people of God as that which they should seek first. However, if the Lord was saying not to glory in wisdom, it must have been a different wisdom from the wisdom that you find in the Word of God. This was not the wisdom that comes from God. It had to be mere human wisdom.

I am sure that Jeremiah was talking about the wisdom by which the lives of the people were being directed. It was mere human wisdom, the kind which Paul later would say in 1 Corinthians was foolishness with God. Paul made a point that while he was speaking wisdom, it was not the wisdom of this world.

It probably has its counterpart today in much that goes on in our educational system. We have really ruled God out of almost everything. And now we find ourselves in the position where we are going to include many things that are forbidden by God as utterly abominable. Paul told Timothy that when people turn away from the truth of God, they turn to fables, things that are not true, things that are very displeasing to the Lord. And this is what has happened, and is happening, to us today. We are inclined to deify education. I am not speaking about the three r's, but about the way of life that is encouraged by those who glory in human wisdom. The wisdom of man leads people away from God, not to Him, and we dare not make that our joy and delight. Many a young person has been ruined spiritually by pursuing degrees in so-called higher education.

What about the second?

B. "Might" (v. 23).

This can mean several things. It can mean physical strength. It can mean military strength. It can mean political strength. It describes any situation where man feels that he is in control, and really invincible.

The people of Judah felt secure because of their armies. We today practically worship at the shrine of physical fitness. We listen daily to people who only feel that if they get into a position of political influence that they will be able to turn things around in our country. But the problem with all

of these things is that they all have to do with man. Nobody is telling us today that "God is our refuge and strength..." Nobody is telling us that if we wait upon the Lord, we can renew our strength. No, we aren't thinking about God any more than the people of Judah were. But we have the Word of God to warn us against trusting in our own might.

The third word is:

C. "Riches" (v. 23).

People have always been inclined to feel that if they have enough money, they can be happy. But how much is enough? The more we have, the more we want. And why do we want money--so we can help others? No, we want to be able to buy what we want, and to go where we want to go, and to do what we want to do. Riches are mentioned throughout Scripture, and it is usually in connection with some warning. We can't serve God and riches. The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Solomon told his son not to set his heart on riches because they can so easily fly away.

It is probably true that we are the richest nation on the face of the earth. But where has it gotten us. Are we trouble-free? Are we the happiest nation? Are our homes happier and more secure.

The Bible is very clear that we are not to find our delight, our joy, our boasting, in money.

Verse 23 tells us that we are always going to glory in something, and when we turn away from the Lord, then we boast in things that not only can never satisfy us, but usually will ruin us. That happened in Judah, and we see the same thing going on in our country today. We have moved God out of our lives, and made things center in ourselves. And the results are just as tragic now as they were in the day of Jeremiah's ministry.

But we can thank God that Jeremiah's ministry was not all negative. It was partly negative, and very importantly negative, but it was not all negative. If the people were not to glory in wisdom, might, and riches, what were they to glory in? What else is left?

II. WHAT THE PEOPLE WERE TO DO (Jer. 9:24).

When we move from verse 23 to verse 24 we move from a life that is man-centered to a life that is God-centered. (Read.)

The Lord wanted His people to glory in the fact that they

understood and knew Him!

Perhaps these expressions could be better understood if we were to translate the two words, that you have been instructed in the truth and have come to recognize Who God is, and why He is so necessary in your lives.

Did you ever thank the Lord for this? I am sure that many of you have. Some can sit under the ministry of the Word for years, and yet never seem to learn anything about the Lord. They never become personally acquainted with Him. They go on living just as though they had never been exposed to the truth at all.

Jeremiah said, on the Lord's behalf, "If you have received instruction that has reached your heart, and you have been drawn into personal fellowship, a living relationship, with the Lord of heaven and earth, THEN GLORY IN THIS!

How much is contained in those words, "That I am the Lord."

But what is important for us to know about the Lord besides the fact that He is the Lord?

It is that the truly good life revolves around Him Who is continually exercising (as the NKJV renders it) "lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord." So these two verses end as they began, reminding us that it is the Lord who is speaking.

What is it that the Lord wants us to know about Him, and to see that He is continually exercising these things in our lives?

The first is, "lovingkindness." This is His mercy. This is His favor toward us. This is His unfailing kindness. How tender and loving the Lord is toward us. And the Lord is showing all of this toward us when we don't deserve any of it. The life of every child of God is a testimony to the amazing goodness of our God in more ways than we ever recognize.

Glory, rejoice, sing, that you know the lovingkindness of the Lord.

The second is, "judgment."

We might call this the Lord's discernment with respect to our lives. It means that the Lord always does the right thing at the right time and in the right way. Cf. Isa. 30:18. We are

always doing the wrong thing at the wrong time and in the wrong way. But God's ways are perfect, not only with us, but "in the earth." This means that whether it is Judah, or Israel, or Babylon, or Assyria, or Egypt, or Rome, or the United States, or any of our personal lives, God is in sovereign control. He is never outsmarted. He is never too late. He never is defeated. He is a God of judgment.

This is something worth glorying in, isn't it?

The third is, "righteousness." From a practical standpoint, this means that God is never wrong. We are always better off, not worse off, because of what the Lord does with us. He never does anything that is contrary to His own righteous character. We are in the best of hands when we are in the Lord's hands.

This is something to sing about.

You see, verse 24 tells us that true happiness is to be found in knowing the Lord, and in trusting Him, rather than seeking the things mentioned in verse 23 which we try to gain for ourselves.

Concl: It is easy to see where the people of Judah were making their mistakes, isn't it? But why is it so hard for us to see that we often are guilty of doing what they did?

Let us examine our own lives tonight, i.e., the way we are living. Are we focused upon what we want, and what we can do for ourselves, or are we thankful that we know the Lord, and praising Him every day for what He does for us, and what He gives to us, and the many ways in which He provides for us. In other words, are our lives centered in ourselves, or are our lives centered in our dear heavenly Father and in His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are living in a country which has been making all of the wrong moves for a long time. The Lord may be bringing things to a head; I can't say for sure. But let us make sure, by the grace of God, that we are delighting ourselves in the Lord, and living so as to bring joy and delight to His heart. We aren't going to change the world, but the Lord may be pleased to use us to awaken others who tonight are on the wrong track.