

"A MESSAGE FOR THOSE WHO WON'T LISTEN"

I. Introduction

- A. America is noted for its optimism and its can-do attitude.
1. This explains why some of America's most successful communicators include people like Norman Vincent Peale, Joyce Meyer, Tony Robbins, Joel Osteen, and Oprah Winfrey.
 2. Americans like to hear people tell them that everything is going to work out alright and that they can accomplish whatever they want.
 3. We don't want to think about things that are unpleasant, which explains why nothing gets done about our vast national debt.
 4. Of course, this problem is not unique to Americans.
 5. Most people find bad news hard to believe.
 6. And people are especially skeptical about warnings of divine judgment.
 7. We can see such skepticism in our first parents when they were in Eden, even though it was the Lord himself who warned them that eating the forbidden fruit would place them under the curse of eternal death.
- B. When we read through the Old Testament's prophetic books, we quickly see that the Bible does not tell us what we want to hear.
1. Instead of assuring us that everything will be alright, it is ruthlessly honest about our desperate plight as sinners.
 2. Of course, the Bible also conveys the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ, but it does not offer hope on our terms but only on

God's terms.

3. As we study Ezekiel 12 tonight, we will see a picture of the Lord's relentlessness in conveying the bad news about sin and its consequences, even when he knows that most of those to whom he is speaking will not listen.

II. A Picture of Exile

- A. The chapter begins by stressing the abysmal spiritual condition of the people of Israel in Ezekiel's day, with the Lord referring to them to as "a rebellious house" three times in the first three verses.
 1. This phrase is then repeated two more times later in the chapter.
 2. These were God's covenant people, but they had persisted in turning a deaf ear to God's Word and going their own way.
 3. They had physical eyes and ears, but they were spiritually blind and deaf.
 4. The same thing can be said of anyone who ignores the things that God says in his Word.
 5. Even if they are highly intelligent in the estimation of the world, the Lord declares them to be fools.
- B. In spite of Israel's rebelliousness and spiritual deafness, the Lord once again sends his Word to them.
 1. He does so by giving Ezekiel instructions to perform another enacted prophecy.
 2. This time, the prophet is told to get himself the kind of baggage that an exile would use to carry away his possessions with him.
 3. Ezekiel is told to dig through the wall of his house and create a hole for himself and his baggage to go through.

4. Then he is told to cover his face so that he cannot see the land.
- C. The Lord stresses that all of this is to be done in the plain sight of the people.
1. Even though they are spiritually blind, God continues to give them opportunities to see the truth.
 2. When the people ask Ezekiel what in the world he is doing, he is to respond with the words that the Lord has given him to speak.
 3. He is instructed to tell them that this visionary oracle has to do with “the prince in Jerusalem and all the house of Israel who are in it.”
 4. The prince is Zedekiah, who took over as ruler when Jehoiachin was carried off into captivity by the Babylonians in 597 BC.
 5. The reason why Ezekiel refers to Zedekiah as prince rather than as king was because he had been installed by the king of Babylon and was a vassal to him.
 6. The sign-act that Ezekiel performed foretold what would take place at the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC.
 7. We are told about this in 2 Kings 25, where Zedekiah tried to escape from the Babylonian siege by making a breach in the city wall.
 8. But the Babylonians soon caught up to Zedekiah, put his eyes out, and took him captive to Babylon.
- D. We might wonder why the Lord would have Ezekiel deliver this message to his fellow exiles.
1. They were already in Babylon.
 2. Why would the Lord be warning them of exile?

3. We need to remember that these people were eagerly hoping for a speedy end to their exile.
4. Most of them thought that Jerusalem was secure, as did the inhabitants of Jerusalem.
5. But it was not secure.
6. More judgment was going to come upon the city, and the reason why it was going to come was because the people had not repented of their covenant unfaithfulness.
7. This was not only true of the Jews who were still in Jerusalem, but also of many who were already in exile.
8. Most of them still did not see that it was their sin that brought this trouble upon them.
9. The fact that God told Ezekiel to convey this message to his fellow exiles underscores the importance of making sure that people see that sin always results in misery.

III. A Picture of Anxiety

- A. In the next part of our passage, the Lord instructs Ezekiel to perform another sign-act.
 1. This time, the prophet is told to eat his bread with a quaking hand and to drink water while trembling with anxiety.
 2. The meaning of this symbolic message is given in verse 19, where the Lord says, "Thus says the Lord GOD concerning the inhabitants of Jerusalem in the land of Israel: They shall eat their bread with anxiety, and drink water in dismay."
 3. This sign illustrates the psychological devastation that the people of Jerusalem will experience when they see their land being laid waste.

4. They will quake with fear and despondency, even as they eat and drink.
- B. One of the things that makes it difficult for people to believe the Bible's warnings of coming judgment is the fact that their lives seem to be okay right now.
1. Even when people experience some measure of difficulty, pain, and sadness in life, they try to look beyond those things and focus on the things that bring them happiness and satisfaction.
 2. Once they get past a time of upheaval, they tend to settle into routines that provide them with some measure of stability and security.
 3. It is a gift of God's mercy that people do not have to live every second of their lives in a state of heightened worry or grave despair.
 4. But we have to remember that feeling secure and content is no guarantee that disaster will not come.
 5. People are often blissfully unaware just before a tragedy strikes.
 6. The reason why the Lord had Ezekiel perform this sign-act was to open people's eyes to see that a devastating catastrophe was on the horizon.
 7. This shows us the importance of giving our consideration to the trauma that people will experience when the last day arrives.
 8. We need to have a sense of how terrible it will be for those who will face God's just wrath on that day.
 9. Remembering this will make us all the more grateful for the deliverance that God has provided for us in Christ, and it will motivate us to try to persuade others of their need for Christ.

IV. No Further Delay

- A. In the final section of our passage, the Lord deals with the attitude that he sees people exhibiting in response to Ezekiel's prophecies of coming judgment.
1. He says to Ezekiel, "what is this proverb that you have about the land of Israel, saying, 'The days grow long, and every vision comes to nothing'?"
 2. In other words, the people were assuming that the prophetic warnings of Jerusalem's destruction were proven to be false by the fact that it had not yet happened.
 3. Other prophets before Ezekiel had said the same thing.
 4. Sure, things looked pretty bad back in 597 when the Babylonians took the king and most of the ruling class into exile.
 5. But Jerusalem was now past that threat.
 6. Surely it would not be too long before the exiles would be allowed to return home.
 7. Don't miss the tragic irony here.
 8. The only reason why Jerusalem had not yet completely fallen to the Babylonians was because of the Lord's patience.
 9. He delays judgment because he wants to give people every opportunity to repent.
 10. And yet what do people do in response?
 11. They cite the delay as evidence that they don't have anything to worry about.

- B. God responds to what the people were saying by announcing through Ezekiel that there will not be any further delay.
1. Very soon, the hammer will fall and Jerusalem will be wiped out.
 2. The Lord was true to his word.
 3. Though Ezekiel's contemporaries were still saying, "The vision that he sees is for many days from now, and he prophesies of times far off", it would not be long before they could no longer say that.
 4. Soon they would see many more deported Jews arriving in Babylon with their own eyes.
 5. Soon they would hear the reports of Jerusalem's downfall with their own ears.
 6. There would be no denying it then.
 7. This is a sobering warning, and it should make us all mindful of what lies in store for this world.
 8. As the apostle Peter writes, "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. And count the patience of our Lord as salvation" (2 Pet 3:9–15 ESV)

V. Conclusion

- A. The church always needs to be aware of the temptation to focus only on the attractive and uplifting aspects of the biblical message.
- B. The Bible has some very unpleasant things to say, and it is incumbent upon the church to express these things, even though we know that most people will be turned off by them.
- C. We do not do this because we want to make Christianity seem dour and disagreeable.
- D. We do it because we need to convey the entirety of what the Lord has said if we are going to be faithful witnesses for Christ.
- E. The Bible contains the greatest news in all creation, but people will not be able to appreciate it as such until they come to see that they need to be delivered from the just judgment that is coming upon this world because of sin.