

Our Treacherous Heart 7-1-01

Jeremiah 6:10, 7:13,21-28, 11:1-15

The last few weeks I have been in the book of Jeremiah. It is such a sad book but so full of jewels. The thing that has struck me is how much this message is suited to America. Many philosophers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries fashioned their rhetoric and reasoning around one goal, the exclusion of God. Aldous Huxley confessed just why that was. He said, "For myself, as, no doubt, for most of my contemporaries, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation. The liberation we desired was simultaneously liberation from certain political and economic system and liberation from a certain system of morality. We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom; we objected to the political and economic system because it was unjust. The supporters of these systems claimed that in some way they embodied the meaning (a Christian meaning they insisted) of the world. There was one admirably simple method of confuting these people and at the same time justifying ourselves in our political and erotic revolt: We could deny that the world had nay meaning whatsoever. I had motives for not wanting the world to have a meaning; consequently I assumed that it had none..."

In other words he and his contemporaries designed a philosophy to fit their goal of freedom from rules and boundaries. They admit that to abandon God leads to the foregone conclusion that life is without meaning. They refused to hear their own conscience – in this pursuit of what they called 'liberty'. What they did not realize was the result was slavery to their own vices. Chief among these so called 'new thinkers' was Fredrick Nietche. The liberty he found led him to a lonely death in an asylum from syphilis. Yet the twentieth century ate up their teaching and even today in modern philosophy classes you are encouraged to consider their enlightened thought. Post Modern thought has been shaped by these men so that man has come to accept ideas like, there are no absolutes, no right or wrong, no good or evil, tolerance for all ideas and actions, etc.

Two and a half millenniums ago Jeremiah heard from the God who inhabits eternity, a message for Judah that I believe applies to this nation and many organized religions of America today. Jer 11:9-10 (NIV)⁹ Then the LORD said to me, "There is a conspiracy among the people of Judah and those who live in Jerusalem.¹⁰ They have returned to the sins of their forefathers, who refused to listen to my words. They have followed other gods to serve them. Both the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken the covenant I made with their forefathers.

And throughout Jeremiah the indictment comes again and again, Jer 6:¹⁰ To whom can I speak and give warning? Who will listen to me? Their ears are closed so they cannot hear. The word of the LORD is offensive to them; they find no pleasure in it.

The reason there is a refusal to listen is simple. There is a conspiracy - not one where we all sit down and say lets do this, it is a silent conspiracy to agree with Aldous Huxley and his philosopher friends because we don't want the boundaries of rules to hinder us from following our desires. We find no pleasure in the word of the Lord for it convicts us and confines our desires. And so we opt for meaninglessness so we can live for pride and pleasure.

If there is a righteous God (and we know that to be the case) then his very being, his character, is the determination of what is good and what is evil. All that is in agreement with his nature is good, and all that is contrary to his character is evil. To be like him is to be good. To rebel and act contrary to his nature is evil. If we want to be free to do as we please we must do away with a God like this or reinvent him in our own changeable, indulgent image. Many denominations and nations have been successful in doing just that – in their imaginations. I heard a report on the extreme to which Denmark has gone down this road. Deviant sexual behavior is no longer a crime. Incest is punishable not by prison time but counseling and community service. The results are devastating. 3 out of 5 children are molested and grow up with severe psychological trauma that will only compound itself in coming generations. The same people pray and complain that God does not answer their prayers. But hear what God says through Jeremiah in 8:6 ⁶ I have listened attentively, but they do not say what is right. No one repents of his wickedness, saying, "What have I done?" Each pursues his own course like a horse charging into battle.

The art of justification is built into modern philosophy. It is never my fault it is always my environment or genes or something beyond my control. It is incredible that man is acting the same as he did thousands of years ago, the same as he acted in the Garden. "It was the woman You gave me." In the end we blame it on our ambivalent God that we have created as if He cannot see or discern the attitudes of our heart.

If we are honest we find this old nature lurking in even the saintliest person. We are ready to charge like those war horses into battle without lending our ear to God. It can be in business, in daily life, in relationships or any desire. Our crime is the same as Judah's, a heart that refuses to listen to God. Instead of consulting the One who can direct us in ways that are good we consult our own stubborn hearts.

Jer 7:21-28 (NIV)²¹ "This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Go ahead, add your burnt offerings to your other sacrifices and eat the meat yourselves!²² For when I brought your forefathers out of Egypt and spoke to them, I did not just give them commands about burnt offerings and sacrifices,²³ but I gave them this command: Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in all the ways I command you, that it may go well with you.²⁴ But they did not listen or pay attention; instead, they followed the stubborn inclinations of their evil hearts. They went backward and not forward.²⁵ From the time your forefathers left Egypt until now, day after day, again and again I sent you my servants the prophets.²⁶ But they did not listen to me or pay attention. They were stiff-necked and did more evil than their forefathers.²⁷ "When you tell them all this, they will not listen to you; when you call to them, they will not answer.²⁸ Therefore say to them, 'This is the nation that has not obeyed the LORD its God or responded to correction. Truth has perished; it has vanished from their lips.

They have ritual religion, and go through the motions, but what about obedience? Verse 23 tells us why God wants obedience, 'so that it may go well with you.' We have the same thing today. "I go to church, I tithe, I even attend a Bible Study." Yes, but are you willing to listen to the Spirit and obey Him in your daily life or are you still your own Lord? Verse 24 says they would not pay attention. Are we? Are you tuning your ear to hear the Spirit of God, to hear his voice as you read the word? They followed the stubborn inclinations of their evil hearts. Jer 13:10 These wicked people, who refuse to listen to my words, who follow the stubbornness of their hearts and go after other gods to serve and worship them,

will be like this belt--completely useless! -We must ask ourselves if that describes us? If we have a desire to be useful then we must listen.

When I just do what I'm inclined to do I have to really watch I don't end up in direct disobedience to the Spirit. If I am inclined to do something, I want to really hear that it is God's desire, that my heart is at peace with God about that thing. I have to really pay attention to the Spirit. That is what Judah had no desire to do. That is what much of organized religion has no desire to do. Formulas are much easier, and I can perform them and still follow my stubborn heart.

This passage also says I should be moving forward in my walk, not backward. Am I? 26 repeats the indictment, - you are not listening or paying attention. Stiff-necked means not turning our attention when the Spirit calls to us. If I am to move forward I need to be attentively listening to the Spirit as Jesus did. I need that consistent walk of listening obedience. I need to live in a loving relationship with my Savior. At the first hint of being off track I need to check and double check, what is the Lord saying.

As we read the last passage watch for the words, 'listen', 'obey me', 'pay attention'. Read Jeremiah 11:1-15 ¹ This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD:
² "Listen to the terms of this covenant and tell them to the people of Judah and to those who live in Jerusalem.³ Tell them that this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Cursed is the man who does not obey the terms of this covenant--⁴ the terms I commanded your forefathers when I brought them out of Egypt, out of the iron-smelting furnace.' I said, 'Obey me and do everything I command you, and you will be my people, and I will be your God.
⁵ Then I will fulfill the oath I swore to your forefathers, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey'--the land you possess today." I answered, "Amen, LORD."⁶ The LORD said to me, "Proclaim all these words in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem: 'Listen to the terms of this covenant and follow them.'⁷ From the time I brought your forefathers up from Egypt until today, I warned them again and again, saying, "Obey me."⁸ But they did not listen or pay attention; instead, they followed the stubbornness of their evil hearts. So I brought on them all the curses of the covenant I had commanded them to follow but that they did not keep."⁹ Then the LORD said to me, "There is a conspiracy among the people of Judah and those who live in Jerusalem.¹⁰ They have returned to the sins of their forefathers, who refused to listen to my words. They have followed other gods to serve them. Both the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken the covenant I made with their forefathers.¹¹ Therefore this is what the LORD says: 'I will bring on them a disaster they cannot escape. Although they cry out to me, I will not listen to them.¹² The towns of Judah and the people of Jerusalem will go and cry out to the gods to whom they burn incense, but they will not help them at all when disaster strikes.¹³ You have as many gods as you have towns, O Judah; and the altars you have set up to burn incense to that shameful god Baal are as many as the streets of Jerusalem.'¹⁴ "Do not pray for this people nor offer any plea or petition for them, because I will not listen when they call to me in the time of their distress.
¹⁵ "What is my beloved doing in my temple as she works out her evil schemes with many? Can consecrated meat avert [your punishment]? When you engage in your wickedness, then you rejoice." Jer 11:1-15 (NIV)

God reminds them they were in a binding agreement. When their forefathers made the agreement one group stood on one hill and the other across the valley on the other hill. One side would read the blessings for obedience and the other the curses that would come on

them for disobedience. (Deut 27:9ff) Now they stand condemned by the covenant they made. (Josh 8:33, Josh 24:16-24 but especially 22,23)

You might be thinking, 'well that was the Law and what does that have to do with me, in this age of grace?' We too enter a covenant, a marriage covenant. Imagine the wife who will not listen to anything her husband says. She goes her own way and follows the stubborn inclinations of her own heart. He woos her and tries to be one in heart with her but she never pays any attention. That can be the church's reaction to the Holy Spirit.

Jer 11:15 (NIV)¹⁵ "What is my beloved doing in my temple as she works out her evil schemes with many? Can consecrated meat avert [your punishment]? When you engage in your wickedness, then you rejoice."

We can be in fellowship and be God's chosen, worshipping in the temple, but planning our evil schemes. Our tithe will not avert the discipline of God and the consequences of sin. If our heart is set on its evil ways and that is where we find joy then our loving husband will be quick to discipline us. A month ago we talked on the invitation of heaven – the call to "come". But it does no good to come if we do not listen. And it does no good to listen if we do not obey.

Lest I be misunderstood I want to be clear that we heard the call to come and listened to what Christ did for us and received his gift of eternal life, his death in our place. But that should not be the end of the listening. A couple in love listen to every word the other shares, but what happens to the marriage if listening stops after the "I do"? That is what God was dealing with in Judah. Not only had she stopped listening but she had other lovers. And the same can happen to us spiritually. We can find our ear more tuned to the world and our stubborn hearts if we do not recognize our great need to hear and obey every day.

I've shared with you before how the slave bound himself to his Master as life long servant by having him put an awl through his ear lobe to the door post. Then the servant would wear a ring in that ear. He was called a 'love slave', meaning he had bound himself to his master out of love. The ear is marked because the master has the servant's ear. The servant is **willing to hear and obey**, out of love and respect for his master. Let us be sure our ear is the Master's first and foremost.

We need this reminder because of the subtlety of Satan and the flesh. It will work its way into our daily lives, ever so slowly, justifying itself all the way, until our attention is fixed on something other than Jesus. I'm reminding us to keep our ear tuned to the Holy Spirit, to keep our hearts tender toward his voice.

As I read the prophets this indictment seems to come every few pages, "you would not listen." Let us be people who will listen and then who will obey what we hear. Let's pray for our nation to be willing to hear, for denominations to be willing to hear. We have to hear and act before there will be revival in their lives and ours. Amen?