

# Jeremiah 25-29

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[0:00] Please open your Bibles to Jeremiah 25, which if you've got a church Bible, it's on page 656. If you'd like a church Bible, the greeters will bring one to you. You'll need one for tonight.

Jeremiah 25 to 29. Next week, it's chapter 30 to 33. So there's your homework of this coming week. Chapter 30 to 33. In September, I will have been the minister here, your minister, for 23 years. Can you look at chapter 25 and verse 3? Jeremiah 25 verse 3. For 23 years, the word of the Lord has come to me, and I have spoken persistently to you, but you have not listened. You've neither listened nor inclined your ears to hear. Let's pray. I am not Jeremiah, and that's not been my testimony. But these chapters are about God's word and how to respond to them. And so here goes Jeremiah's three steps, his three-step guide to engaging with God's word. That's what we're about on Sundays. Step one, in chapter 25, is this.

[1:16] Shut up and listen. Shut up and listen. At the year of 605, Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, the king of Judah, is on the throne.

And it's also significantly the first year of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. It's only a matter of time before Nebuchadnezzar notices little Judah and does something nasty to them.

And while that is going on on the international stage, Jeremiah has been preaching for 23 years. From the 13th year of Josiah, the son of Ammon, king of Judah, to this day, the word of the Lord has come to me.

I've spoken persistently to you, but you have not listened. 23 years is a long time to be ignored. That's hard for Jeremiah.

But for God, this has gone on for generations. Verse 4. You've neither listened nor inclined your ears to hear, though the Lord persistently sent to you all his servants, the prophet, saying, Turn now, every one of you.

[2:16] Verse 6. The prophet said, Do not go after other gods. Verse 7. You have not listened to me, declares the Lord, that you might provoke me to anger with the work of your hands to your own harm. 23 years of preaching and nobody listening.

Generations of prophets have come and gone, but no one listens. And so what is Jeremiah to do? Stop preaching. Swap it for something a little bit less demanding.

Leave it to cool off a while. Well, none of the above. He continues to preach the word in season and out of season. To remind them to shut up and start listening.

Because if they had done that, they would have heard something profoundly disturbing. Verse 8. Therefore, thus says the Lord, because you have not obeyed my words, behold, I will send for all the tribes of the north, declares the Lord, and for Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, my servant, my servant, and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants, and against all these surrounding nations, and I will devote them to destruction and make them horror, a hissing, and an everlasting desolation.

It's the first time that a foreign king is described as the Lord's servants in real time. For the first time, God's people are to be treated in the same way as the damned nations all around them.

[3:34] And this is hardcore. This is Jeremiah preaching his heart out, doing everything he can to get through to his compatriots. To stop talking and start listening to the voice of God before it's too late.

Verse 10. I will banish from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the grinding of the millstones and the light of the lamp. Everything has to stop.

Good times, bad times. The whole land should become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon 70 years. Ignoring God is immensely foolish.

And when God is speaking, we need to listen. And yes, Jeremiah says, eventually, after 70 years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon for their iniquity, and Babylon will get a taste of its own medicine, and I will bring it upon that land, verse 13.

All the words I've added against it, everything written in this book, but nothing in the meantime is more important for you than to stop talking and listen. Before you are silenced, before the judgment. [4:40] It's hard, I think, to read the book of Jeremiah and not see that there is nothing more important than listening to the word of God. God speaks, we listen.

That's the deal. It's one of the key themes that runs all the way through the book, but it runs all the way through the Bible, and we ignore it in our peril. So, take the book of Hebrews, for instance. What does Hebrews say time and time again? Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion. Chapter 3, verse 17.

If you hear his voice, do not harden your heart as you did in the rebellion. Chapter 4, verse 7. Again, it says, he appoints a certain day. Today, saying through David long afterwards, in the words already quoted, Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.

And so, tonight, the choice is, God speaks through his word. You can either listen or harden your heart. What does it mean to harden your heart? It means, doesn't it, to refuse to listen to God when he's talking to you.

[5:50] It means to block out his words and say, whatever. That instead of listening, we construct our own inner narrative to drown out the words of God.

And I suspect that is the greatest danger faced in this church. We meet together to worship, and we open the Bible, and every time, God speaks. And the choice is, either we listen to it, or we block out the words.

And the truth is this. Hearing God speak and not doing anything about it, makes it easier the next time to hear God speak and not do anything about it.

And that takes us to the heart of the book and the heart of the Bible. How come God's people do not listen? Have you ever thought about that? It really is astonishing. For two-thirds of the Bible, God's people effectively ignore what God has to say to them.

Almost uniformly. How come Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, take those three, they preach so powerfully and eloquently. They lie on their side at times.

[6:58] They act out the message. They wear yokes. They paint very powerful word pictures. And it makes absolutely no difference. It is because God's people refuse to listen when God speaks.

And I know that we are in a different place to them. But what the writer of the Hebrews does, and other places in the New Testament do with this material, should bring us up short.

Because they warn us that their issue is our issue. Are we listening to the word of God? Really listening? You will hear it again and again.

God is speaking to you constantly through his word. And are you listening? Second step. Firstly, Jeremiah says, shut up and start listening. But from verse 15 of chapter 25, the second step is this. Swallow the message. Internalize the message. Swallow the message. Verse 15. Thus, the Lord, the God of Israel, said to me, Take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it.

[8:04] They shall drink and stagger and be crazed because of the sword that I am sending among them. Judgment is coming, and Judah has to swallow it. But not only Judah, the entire race. Verse 17.

So I took the cup from the Lord's hand and made all the nations to whom the Lord sent me to drink it. Jerusalem and the cities of Judah. Its kings and its officials. Pharaoh. Verse 19. All the mixed tribes of Egypt.

All the kings of the land of Ur, all the kings of the land of the Philistines, Edom, Moab, Tyre, Sidon, the kings of the coastland, Dedan, Timur, Buz, and all who cut the corners of their hair.

I've got no idea what cutting the corners of their hair is. One commentator thought it was sideburns, but I don't think he's right. Verse 24. All the kings of Arabia. All the kings of the mixed tribes who dwell in the desert.

All the kings of Zimri. All the kings of Elam. All the kings of Media. All the kings of the north. Far and near. One after another. All the kingdoms of the world that are on the face of the earth. And after them, the king of Babylon shall drink. Just in case you thought he might miss out.

[9:05] He's saying, isn't he, really clearly, every nation comes under the judgment of God. With relentless efficiency, Jeremiah details every one of Judah's neighbors and not friends.

And they must all drink the cup of God's wrath, he says. All of them. And if they refuse, chapter 25, verse 27. You shall say to them, thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, drink, be drunk and vomit.

Fall and rise no more because of the sword that I'm sending among you. And if they refuse to accept the cup from your hand to drink, then you shall say to them, thus says the Lord of hosts, you must drink. And there's no escape.

That's the basic point of all this. That the nations, along with Judah, need to embrace the message by drinking the cup. And yes, they still resist even when they hear the word of God so graphically, they do nothing.

And so what stops us listening and acting? What is it that makes the difference between hearing God's word, even listening to God's word, and then responding to him in the way that we should?

[10:12] Which takes us to our conscience. I want to spend a bit of time here tonight. What is it that makes the difference between the days when you and I are really arrested and grabbed by the word of God, and we have to change because of it.

And then the days when we treat God's word like background noise that we can safely ignore. And according to the Bible, it's our conscience that makes the difference.

It's our conscience which pokes and prods us into either active listening and an active response. It is our conscience that the Spirit uses to lovingly say to us, hey, stupid, I'm talking to you.

This is for you. You need to do something about this now. Now, we all know this difference. The days when we are spectators and critiquers, and the days when we know that we've been addressed by the living God.

And the problem is that our conscience doesn't actually work that well. Unfortunately, our conscience has been damaged in our arrival into this world.

[11:23] And the way that we treat our conscience hasn't helped us either. What that means is that your conscience and mind functions sporadically. Some days it works accurately, and the next day it doesn't.

It's the Apostle Paul that pays most attention to this. And I really want you kind of parents to get hold of this this morning and to teach it to your children this week.

Paul, the Apostle, he thought the longest and hardest about this because Israel had such a lousy record of listening and responding to God for generations. Paul speaks of three separate issues that can affect our consciences.

And Hebrews adds a fourth. Even though we have a conscience, we can have a seared conscience. So, 1, 2, 3, 4, 2, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, Paul says, by not responding to the word of God, we damage our ability to listen and respond.

That's a frightening thing. And so when it comes to your conscience, it really is a case of use it or lose it. When it comes to listening to God, if we fail to listen, it gets harder to listen.

[12:41] Our consciences malfunction. We don't hear God critiquing our legalism and our smugness. Sometimes we can have a defiled conscience.

Paul says to Titus, To the pure all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure, but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. They press to know God, but they deny Him by their works.

So, our sinful behavior actually has an effect on us. You don't need me to tell you that if you sin today, it will be much easier to do that tomorrow.

Children, you know that, don't you? When you do something wrong today, it's far easier to do that wrong tomorrow. We know that. All of us know that.

Sin, it's like it clears a path for itself. And the problem is, when we sin, we defile our conscience, and we make it easier for us to silence our defiled conscience.

[13:47] And so, children, it's why your mum and dad say, Listen, the reason why we need to address this now, the reason why we need to talk about this now, is so that it doesn't grow, it doesn't get easier to add sin upon sin upon sin.

In 1 Corinthians 8, Paul also writes about a weak conscience. He's speaking about new Christians, and he says, Not all possess knowledge, but some, through their former association with idols, they eat food as regularly offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.

Paul is saying, theologically, their beliefs are all over the shop. But the result of that is that they can't eat food offered to idols, because they think, if I eat this, it's going to affect my salvation. But that is real. Sometimes, sin has messed us up so badly, that our consciences are not a good guide to anything. Hebrews goes as far to say, in Hebrews 10, 22, that our hearts are sprinkled clean from an evil conscience.

The problem with our conscience is not, that not just has the detection system been blunted, but now our consciences can actually be in the business of licensing sin, promoting it.

[15 : 07] That's what we're up against. The faculty that God has put into us, that is there to tell us we need to listen and act on, has been compromised.

It's got a virus. And it's not even reliably compromised. That is what we're up against. And when you get this, it makes a huge difference, a massive difference.

And so it means that every time we come to God's words, and we come to hear God speak, we'll cry for his help, knowing that by his Holy Spirit, working on our fragile and unreliable conscience, he will help us to listen, and to swallow what he has to say to us, no matter how unpalatable it is.

But you cannot do that on your own. And so I wonder where you are, where I am in my ability to hear God speak.

There are times in my life where I've heard God's word preached, and I've drunk in every word. I can remember those sermons, like you can, I'm sure. And there are other times it is like water off a duck's back.

[16 : 16] Because our consciences can harden, day by day being seduced into not listening. And you may realise tonight that your conscience has been damaged in the past by long, hidden, even long forgotten sinful behaviour.

And it may be that you are confronted with the fact that your conscience and mind, although a gift from God, are completely out of whack. And so what are we to do? If that's you tonight, and you just are hardened, it's like water off a duck's back, what do you do?

You throw yourself on God. And you ask him to help you. Help us here as he speaks to us of salvation and judgement, remembering that God has gone to enormous lengths to speak to us. In ways that are designed to get through, even to the most damaged conscience tonight. So look at Jeremiah 25 verse 30. The Lord will roar from on high. And from his holy habitation, he offers his voice.

He will roar mightily against his foe, and shout like those who tread grapes against all the inhabitants of the earth. The clamour will resound to the ends of the earth, for the Lord is an indictment against the nations. He is entering into judgment with all flesh, and the wicked he will put to the sword.

[17 : 32] The Lord roars from Zion, and we must listen. Why has God gone to such lengths to speak to us in such vivid and varied ways in the Old Testament?

It is largely because we are such bad listeners, because we are broken people. God speaks, doesn't he, in sending Jesus the living word.

The living word, the word made flesh, to speak truth into our lives. There's one remaining thing I want to pick up on, something that I think escaped Jeremiah, perhaps, but must not escape us. For Jeremiah, there is no mistaking that we must drink the most awful cup of all, and drain it to the very bottom. It's worse than any childhood medicine.

It's worse than any fruit juice containing kale. It is the most awful cup that is picked up and drained to the bottom by none other than Jesus himself.

[18 : 42] All the gospel writers pick up on this, don't they? Mark, for example, Jesus says, Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. He struggles in the garden. Remove this cup from me, yet not what I will, but what you will.

And the Lord Jesus, he listened like no one has ever listened to God. And he swallowed the message like no other, even as he faced and exhausted the wrath of God for us on the cross. Which means that no cup that we can drink can ever be as bad as that. It actually means that any cup that we have to drain can only be for our good, even if it makes us gag, even if the cup that we have to drink appears to cause us short-term pain and nausea.

It can only be for our good and for our glory because Jesus removes the terror from these passages. From 25, 32 to 38, for example, Jesus enables us both to listen and to respond, and then step three, he frees us up to speak.

And it's nothing short of remarkable that Jesus uses those who struggle to listen, who struggle to swallow, to actually pass on his word. Jeremiah 26 to 29 is step three.

[20:03] It's all about speaking the word. And Jeremiah says, preach it, come what may. That's what he says to us as a church. The reason why we've spent so long on the importance and the challenge of listening to the word of God is that this holds the key to declaring it.

It's really simple. Listening to God speak, ourselves being gripped by it, shaped by it, humbled by it, changed by it, ultimately is the key to proclaiming it.

It's why when the church stops listening, it's got nothing to say. And of course God works by his grace. None of us is anything ever more than an unworthy servant.

God always uses us by his grace, whether we've grasped the message we pass on to others, or whether it almost passes through us without having affected us. But if we are ever able to say, with Charles Wesley, preach Christ to all and cry in death, behold the Lamb, the only way that we're able to kind of make this cry as a church family is if we are mastered by God's word, regularly, arrestingly, authentically.

Like Jeremiah. Let me walk you through the rest of these chapters really quickly. Chapter 26, he walks to the very epicenter of Jerusalem and he preaches the temple sermon. It's the temple sermon that we first heard in chapter 7.

[21:32] It says this, Stand in the court of the Lord's house and speak to all the cities of Judah that come to worship in the house of the Lord and all the words that I command you. Verse 3, Maybe they will listen and everyone turn from its evil way that I may relent of the disaster that I intend to do them because of their evil deeds.

I think the subtext there is God is saying, Don't really expect that. God isn't going to put money on that happening. Thus says, The Lord, if you will not listen to me to walk in my law that I've set before you and to listen to the words of my servants, the prophets whom I send to you urgently, though you've not listened, then I will make this house like Shiloh and I will make the city a curse for all the nations of the earth.

He's saying this in the very temple. This is coming down, Jeremiah says. And the response, chapter 26, verse 8, when Jeremiah finished speaking, All that the Lord had commanded him to speak to all the people, then the priests and the prophets and all the people laid hold of him saying, You shall die.

What a response. I've never had that. Not in 23 years. You shall die on the way out. Thank you for that. What on earth would make Jeremiah want a job like this?

Well, only because he knows God has spoken to him first and he's embraced the message.

Chapter 12 is fantastic. They are saying, You shall die. Jeremiah says, verse 13, And Jeremiah spoke to all the officials and all the people.

[22:52] The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the words you've heard. Now, therefore, mend your ways and your deeds and obey the voice of the Lord your God and the Lord will relent of the disaster that he's pronounced against you. But as for me, behold, I'm in your hands.

Do with me as seems good and right to you. Only know for certain that if you put me to death, you will bring innocent blood upon yourself and upon the city and its inhabitants. For in truth, the Lord has sent me to you to speak all these words in your ears.

Come and have a go if you think you're hard enough. You've got to love him, haven't you? What a preacher. 26 verses 16 to 19, The elders of the land get him off the hook, which is great, but it's interesting if you look at verses 20 to 23, there's a little note about a guy called Uriah.

And the elders of the land are talking about this and their theology, again, is a bit all over the place. Their reasoning for letting Jeremiah go is a little bit suspect, but they do say that this faithful prophet, Uriah, died.

Jeremiah escapes with his life. Uriah speaks the truth and dies. But they are willing to speak because they've heard the voice of God. And they are compelled, they are also willing to preach Christ to everyone and anyone.

[24:02] Look at the start of chapter 27. It's like a G8 meeting of all the world leaders in Jerusalem in Zedekiah's day and a group of nations united by the fact that they're all about to be crushed by the Babylonians.

And what's Jeremiah to do? Well, verse 2, God says, strap on a yoke, go to this international meeting of heads of state with an animal's yoke around your neck and tell them all, you are going to die.

In chapter 27, verse 8, if any nation or kingdom will not serve Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and put its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, I will punish that nation with a sword, with famine, and with pestilence.

He said, don't swap this message for a sugar-coated one. And he takes on all comers, verse 12, bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon. Verse 14, do not listen to the words of the false prophets.

Just get the fact that listening to God speak ourselves and embracing that word is the key to life. Listen to God's word and that is why not only does he preach it come what may, he preaches the message to everyone and he does it faithfully.

[25:08] Chapter 28, we're introduced to another prophet, Hananiah, who says, verse 2, don't worry, I've broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two years, everything's going to be a-okay.

Jeremiah's response is priceless. Verse 6, Amen, may the Lord do this. That would be fantastic. However, verse 8, the prophets who preceded you and me from ancient times, they prophesied war, famine, pestilence.

As for this prophet who prophesied peace, well, good luck with that one if it happens, then it will be known that the Lord has truly sent the prophet. And the conclusion is very succinct at the end of the chapter, verse 17, in that same year, in the seventh month, the prophet Hananiah died.

Jeremiah would not be deflected. He spoke the word of God faithfully. It was God's word and he knew he couldn't muck around with it. He listened to it. He embraced it. He spoke it. But he could never, ever change it.

It's a question for those who preach, isn't it? Am I being faithful to the message? That is the question. Does the Bible teach this? Because it's all we've got.

[26:17] Ultimately, God does not ask us as a church to be smart or cutting edge or impressive or even uber sensitive to outsiders. Our allegiance is to God alone and our role is to speak God's word after him.

Faithfully to all, come what may. And we apply the word of God to ourselves and the people of our generation, which is what Jeremiah does in chapter 29. And we can't finish looking at these chapters without dealing with the fridge magnet verses and the bookmarks and the cards that we send to one another with these verses on.

Now, the main thing to remember is that Jeremiah is actually applying his message of salvation through judgment to his contemporaries. He writes a series of letters, chapter 29, encouraging them to shift their thinking from refugees to residents.

The first letter is in verse 4. They've got to change from refugees to residents, from victims to visionaries as they live in Babylon. And here's what God says to everyone now living in Babylon. He says, verse 4, build houses, live in them, plant gardens, eat the produce. Take wives, have sons, daughters, take wives, have sons, give your daughters a marriage, they may bear sons and daughters. Multiply that, do not decrease.

[27:38] Echoes of Eden. Keep going. Seek the welfare of the city where I've sent you into exile. Pray to the Lord on its behalf, in its welfare, you will find your welfare. Now I think it's really important that you realise that this is temporary.

It's part of submitting to judgement, but it's also self-interested, not in a bad way. You live there, invest in society. Jeremiah continues in the well-known verses, verse 10 and 11, for thus says the Lord when 70 years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you and I will fulfil to you my promise and bring you back to this place for I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope and then you'll call upon me and come and pray to me and I will hear you, you'll seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart, I'll be found by you, declares the Lord and I will restore your fortunes and gather from all the nations and all the places where I've driven you, declares the Lord and I'll bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

They are great verses but they are not primarily designed for greeting cards or fridge magnets but for exiles under judgment. The great plans are not boyfriends or businesses, they are nothing more or less than the new covenant itself, you will seek me and you will find me and Jeremiah is

preaching salvation to those who long for it, who should be longing for it.

It's all about the beauty of submitting to God's plan and the foolishness of resisting it. Verse 17 brings us full circle what happens in verses 17 to 19 because they did not pay attention to my words, those people don't submit to judgment will be exposed to more judgment and incidentally what's going to happen to Babylon?

Well those who come back to God get a future and a hope but Babylon is judged at the end.

Seeking the welfare of the city lasts for a little while, 70 years until Babylon is called to account for its sin but even at this stage they are not listening to Jeremiah.

[29 : 43] Just glance at the end of chapter 29 with me. A guy called Shemaiah of Nehalim writes a beautiful letter to Zephaniah the son of Messiah the priest and says verse 26 the Lord has made you priest why aren't you rooting out every madman who prophesies to put him in the stocks and neck irons just in case he hasn't missed the point why have you not rebuked Jeremiah of Anathoth who's prophesying to you what does Jeremiah do?

He keeps bringing the word of God and God will punish Shemaiah because he's spoken rebellion against the Lord and as you read through the richness of these chapters you cannot miss that our God is there and he is not silent in the words of Francis Schaeffer.

Our God is a talking God he speaks and he speaks through the written words of the Bible and he speaks through the living word of his son in the power of the spirit now what should we do?

This is my son listen to him and so our response at the end of these chapters which are exhausting is to ask God to give us the wisdom to shut up and listen and ask God to straighten out and sanitize sensitize our consciences so that we actually drink in what he says and so that every time we open his word we do so asking God help us in all our fractured perception to see how this applies to us and then having taken on board God's word ourselves we ask God for his grace and his power to speak that word into the lives of others our family our friends to ask God for his grace and power to speak that word into the lives of others because it really does make a difference because this is the word that brought us to new life in Christ and this is the word that God uses by his spirit to transform and to make us new people in Christ and it doesn't matter whether our eyes have been opened for three weeks or whether we've been following Jesus for decades and we've just grown blase in what is in front of us this is the living word of God that our God the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ uses to make people like us more like him for our good and for his glory let's pray together I'll see you next time.