

Lenten Devotional March 12, 2021

Scripture

Jeremiah 11:1-8, 14-17

1 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: 2 Hear the words of this covenant, and speak to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. 3 You shall say to them, Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Cursed be anyone who does not heed the words of this covenant, 4 which I commanded your ancestors when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, from the iron-smelter, saying, Listen to my voice, and do all that I command you. So shall you be my people, and I will be your God, 5 that I may perform the oath that I swore to your ancestors, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as at this day. Then I answered, "So be it, LORD." 6 And the LORD said to me: Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem: Hear the words of this covenant and do them. 7 For I solemnly warned your ancestors when I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, warning them persistently, even to this day, saying, Obey my voice. 8 Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but everyone walked in the stubbornness of an evil will. So I brought upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do, but they did not. . . . 14 As for you, do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer on their behalf, for I will not listen when they call to me in the time of their trouble. 15 What right has my beloved in my house, when she has done vile deeds? Can vows and sacrificial flesh avert your doom? Can you then exult? 16 The LORD once called you, "A green olive tree, fair with goodly fruit"; but with the roar of a great tempest he will set fire to it, and its branches will be consumed. 17 The LORD of hosts, who planted you, has pronounced evil against you, because of the evil that the house of Israel and the house of Judah have done, provoking me to anger by making offerings to Baal.

Devotional

The Rev. Joseph W. Hedden Jr. '97

Is there a more hopeless verse than Jeremiah 11:14? How can a prophet be commanded *not* to pray for the people? Would it ever reach the point for you pastors and your ministry to stop praying for your congregation? I think we would all say, "I certainly hope not." Indeed, prayer for me is sometimes a last refuge when I can't think of what else I could do for or with someone!

But here in Jeremiah we are not dealing with normal times or a normal command. First, this passage is not about what Jeremiah wants so much as what *God* wants. Jeremiah may desire to pray—we don't know. But God commands the prophet not to "waste his breath," so to speak. Second, what might cause God to issue such a command? Perhaps God will only work with those who want to be part of the covenant agreement. If there is no mutuality, there can be no prayer, in other words. Have the sinful so tested God's patience and willfully ignored God's warning (v. 7) that prayers fall unheard to the ground?

I don't pretend to know. But there is one thing I do notice here, and it is God's command to listen in verse 4. In my best moments of prayer, I listen well to God and try to follow the divine command. In my worst, my prayer time is devoid of listening; I'm too busy speaking to let God speak!

Prayer

God, when I think I have it all figured out, correct me. When I think I know better than you do how to run the world, enlighten me. When I can hear every other sound under the sun but your voice, help me to listen. Amen.