

BIBLE CHALLENGE 2018

WEEK 41

The Bible Challenge 2018 Intro and the reflections and notes for each week may be found at biblechallenge.pendletonchurch.org

Read 4 chapters per day

October 8-14: Galatians 6; Jeremiah 1-27

The book of Jeremiah contains a written account of conversations between God and the prophet Jeremiah. God explains some things to the prophet about why the people are under judgment and how they can be delivered. God gives the prophet messages and warnings to be delivered to the people. God uses examples; analogies such as divorce, and some satire to describe the ways in which the people have turned away from God. And God gives the prophet tangible signs that also serve as examples. Look for the pattern of sinful behavior you have seen throughout Israel's history and that you see Paul correcting in his letters to the churches. How do these behaviors compare to the way people, even Christians conduct their lives in contemporary American culture?

According to the record we have in our Holy Scriptures, Jeremiah spent his life attempting to turn God's people back to following God's laws and living holy lives in this world. We can observe in his writing that he was persecuted by the people, and also that he questioned God with regard to his call as a prophet. He was committed to following God and to calling the people to return to Godly practices and often had to deliver unpopular messages to the people because of his faith. Have you ever had to be the one – in your family, among friends/acquaintances, at work, etc. – who had to stand for your faith in any particular situations? Were you uncomfortable? Perhaps ridiculed or laughed at, just because of your commitment to the holy way of life you know God has called you to as a disciple of Jesus Christ? Then you know a bit of what Jeremiah must have felt like. It seems people in today's American culture want to go their own way. Individualism has become so prevalent there appears to no longer be a common culture among us. Many do not want to hear the gospel message, dismiss it as a myth, or point to Christians they have experienced who are not living the life they claim is right and godly. In addition, many who claim to be Christians disregard traditional Christian faith and live according to their individualistic conceptualization of what they believe Christianity should be. Considering the gospels and the other books of the Bible you have read, what have you observed the writers of Scripture teach about living a godly life? How does that play out in your own life?

As you begin reading chapter 20, Jeremiah is under persecution and complains to God about it. See if you can identify with his feelings. How would you feel if God called you to deliver messages to your community that were similar to the messages Jeremiah had to give God's people? But wait, aren't all disciples of Jesus Christ called to share the Gospel message with the people God has placed in their lives? Is that just as scary to us? Are the persecutions we face as difficult for us as Jeremiah's were for him? Do we avoid telling people about our faith in Jesus because we don't want to feel like Jeremiah did?

There's another side to this question of being the people who are supposed to bring the salvation message to the world. It's the appearance of our Christian lives to those who are not part of the church. There was a definite contrast between the way Jeremiah lived his life and that of the people he was bringing God's message. In today's American church there isn't much of a difference between the church and the mainstream culture regarding lifestyle. Divorce rates, out of wedlock births, practices of type and content of entertainment used, drug and alcohol abuse, etc. is the same for those inside and outside the church. Some would argue that the whole thing about Jesus is that he welcomed sinners. And that is true. But he also said "Go, and sin no more" (John 8:11).

The Christian life is intended to be a life of continuous transformation into the image of Jesus, the sinless Son of God and Son of Man. Is our Christian discipleship impacting our lives in such a way that we can go to the world, as Jesus commanded, and show them what true salvation looks like “on earth as it is in heaven”? Are our day to day lifestyles a credible witness of the transforming power of a real relationship with God, or are we assuming we can receive God’s grace and not allow God to rule and reign in our lives? Jeremiah’s call was a call to repentance, to confess sin and turn away from it to a better way of life. Jesus’ call to us today is no different. Look back at the first verse for this week, Galatians 6:1, and remember what Paul wrote in 6:7-10. The Christian life is not about living any way we please just because we are under grace. The evidence of a grace-filled life is the fruit of repentance.