

The Voice of the LORD

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 04 November 2018

Preacher: Shawn Woo

- [0 : 00] It's great to see you all talking and getting to know each other. Today, the passage is Jeremiah chapter 40, verse 1 through chapter 43, verse 7.
- Because it's a long passage, I'll be referencing it as I preach. And in the beginning, I'm only going to read the first 12 verses of chapter 40.
- Before I do that, let me pray and seek God's help. Heavenly Father, we are here gathered in your presence as people who are indwelt by your spirit.
- Seeking to grow in our knowledge of your voice. In our ability to hear it. And in our faith and commitment to follow it.
- We ask that as we hear from you, from this passage of scripture. That you speak to us. That your spirit would open the eyes of our hearts.
- [1 : 20] That we might see your truth, believe it and live in accordance with it. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. So let me read Jeremiah 40, verses 1 to 12 to begin.
- The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord after Nebuchadnezzar, the captain of the guard, had let him go from Ramah.
- When he took him bound in chains along with all the captives of Jerusalem and Judah who were being exiled to Babylon. The captain of the guard took Jeremiah and said to him, The Lord your God pronounced this disaster against this place.
- The Lord has brought it about and has done as he said. Because you sinned against the Lord and did not obey his voice, this thing has come upon you. Now behold, I release you today from the chains on your hands.
- If it seems good to you to come with me to Babylon, come, and I will look after you well. But if it seems wrong to you to come with me to Babylon, do not come. See, the whole land is before you.
- [2 : 24] Go wherever you think it good and right to go. If you remain, then return to Gedaliah the son of Ahicham, son of Shaphan, whom the king of Babylon appointed governor of the cities of Judah.
- And dwell with him among the people. Or go wherever you think it right to go. So the captain of the guard gave him an allowance of food and a present and let him go. Then Jeremiah went to Gedaliah the son of Ahicham at Mizpah and lived with him among the people who were left in the land.
- When all the captains of the forces in the open country and their men heard that the king of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah the son of Ahicham, governor in the land, and had committed to him men, women, and children, those of the poorest of the land who had not been taken into exile to Babylon, they went to Gedaliah at Mizpah, Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and Jeremiah, Johanan the son of Kariah, Sariah the son of Tanhumeth, the sons of Ephai the Netophathite, Jezaniah the son of Mekathite, they and their men.
- Gedaliah the son of Ahicham, son of Shaphan, swore to them and their men, saying, Do not be afraid to serve the Chaldeans. Dwell in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and he shall be well with you.

As for me, I will dwell at Mizpah to represent you before the Chaldeans who will come to us. But as for you, gather wine and summer fruits and oil, and store them in your vessels, and dwell in your cities that you have taken.

[3 : 52] Likewise, when all the Judeans who were in Moab and among the Ammonites, and in Edom and in other lands, heard that the king of Babylon had left the remnant in Judah, and had appointed Gedaliah the son of Ahicham, son of Shaphan, as governor over them, then all the Judeans returned from all the places to which they had been driven, and came to the land of Judah, to Gedaliah at Mizpah.

And they gathered wine and summer fruits in great abundance. This is the word of the Lord. Our depth of disappointment is often directly proportional to our expectations, how high our expectations were.

When we fully expect something to come through for us, but it doesn't, we become disappointed. When we expect a certain favorable response from somebody, but when we talk to them, we get a different response, we become disappointed.

When we are decidedly set on a course of action, but our course gets derailed, and we don't get our way, we get disappointed, right? With God, though, God is not a person that we can manipulate according to our own whims and wishes.

He is the sovereign king who executes his own will, and exerts his power over our lives, and over the entire universe. So, and as his subjects, then, whether it is agreeable to us or not, we must obey the voice of the Lord, and that's for our good.

[5 : 21] But when God contradicts our desires, alters our plans, or upsets our expectations, we can be disappointed, even sullen and angry with God, or we could resort to denial.

And this is exactly what happens to the people of Judah after the Babylonian conquest and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. And we see two characteristic responses of sinful human beings when that happens.

And first, in chapter 40 and 41, we see their defiance, and in chapters 42 and 43, we see their denial. And the main point of this sermon, really, and this passage, is that whether it is agreeable to us or not, we must obey the voice of the Lord for our good.

The people of Judah were complacent and secure because they had Jerusalem as their city, the capital city, chosen, and King David and his descendants reigning over them.

And because they said among themselves, their attitude was that God promised to have the descendants of David rule over this kingdom forever. And he did, 2 Samuel 7. And God lives here with us because this is where the temple of the Lord is.

[6 : 30] What can then possibly happen to this place? Who can do us harm when God is with us? And that kind of assurance, false assurance, really, made them commit idolatry in the complacency.

They did not pursue the Lord wholeheartedly, and they became deaf to the repeated warnings of Prophet Jeremiah about God's impending judgment. And because of that, you can imagine their deep confusion, disillusionment, and despair when the city of Jerusalem was destroyed and the temple was burned to the ground.

And chapter 40 tells us what happened after that, in particular to Prophet Jeremiah. So we already saw at the end of chapter 39, verses 11 to 14, it kind of gave us a high-level summary of what happened to Jeremiah.

So Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, ordered Nebuchadnezzar, the captain of the guard, to deal well with Jeremiah. He ordered him to do that and to have him free to stay in Judah under the care of Gedaliah, the son of Ahicham, the son of Shaphan.

And now chapter 40, verses 1 to 6, kind of gives us the low-level details about how Nebuchadnezzar executed this command. So look at verse 1 with me. It says, The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord after Nebuchadnezzar, the captain of the guard, had let him go from Ramah when he took him bound in chains along with all the captives of Jerusalem and Judah who were being exiled to Babylon.

[7 : 55] So it appears that Jeremiah wasn't released immediately after Nebuchadnezzar told Nebuchadnezzar to treat him well. Instead, he was taken in chains to transport along with the rest of the captives of Judah to Ramah, where the official kind of Babylonian tribunal was deciding the fate of all the Judean captives.

And why Nebuchadnezzar, the captain of the guard, did this becomes apparent in verses 2 to 6. Read with me. The captain of the guard took Jeremiah and said to him, The Lord your God pronounced this disaster against this place.

And the Lord has brought it about and has done as he said, because you sinned against the Lord and did not obey his voice. This thing has come upon you. Now behold, I release you today from the chains on your hands.

If it seems good to you to come with me to Babylon, come, and I will look after you well. But if it seems wrong to you to come with me to Babylon, do not come. See, the whole land is before you. Go wherever you think it's good and right to go.

If you remain, then return to Getolah, the son of Ike, and the son of Shaphan, whom the king of Babylon appointed governor of the cities of Judah, and dwell with him among the people. Or go wherever you think it right to go.

[9 : 02] So the captain of the guard gave him an allowance of food and a present and let him go. Now, it's a little bit unfortunate that the English second person pronoun, you, doesn't distinguish the singular from the plural.

So it's just you. It could be or you all. But it's making an important point here because in the Hebrew, when in verse 2, Nebuchadnezzar then says, the Lord, your God, pronounced this disaster against this place.

The second person pronoun, your, is singular. So the Babylonian captain of the guard is referring to the Lord as Jeremiah's God, your God. But then in verse 3, when he says, because you sinned against the Lord and did not obey his voice, this thing has come upon you.

The you there is in the second person plural. It's not, he's not speaking there to Jeremiah, but he's speaking to all the Judean captives that are there watching this public trial.

So this is a public trial, Jeremiah, that Nebuchadnezzar intended as a public rebuke to the Judeans who refused to surrender to the Babylonians in spite of repeated urgings of Jeremiah.

[10 : 07] So Nebuchadnezzar then associates God with Jeremiah. He's your God, but he associates the sin and the disobedience that brought this judgment to all the Judeans, you all. And that's a frightful thing, right?

There are some people here for whom the Lord is not your God, but his God or her God, their God, but he's not your God.

And that is a big problem. Do you have a relationship with God so that you can say of him, the Lord, my God? Have you aligned yourself with God's purposes?

Or are you living for yourself in rebellion and disobedience? If that's the case, I urge you this morning to not leave this place until you know clearly where you stand in relation to God and say in faith that the Lord is your God.

So in short, Nebuchadnezzar then the pagan military commander is bringing a stinging rebuke to the people of Judah. Your own prophet spoke the word of God whom you were supposed to worship, but you did not listen.

[11 : 18] That's why this disaster has come upon you. And here's what will happen to the friends of Babylon. Jeremiah, you're free to go wherever you want. You can go with us to Babylon where I will take good care of you, or you can remain here under the care of Gedaliah whom we have appointed governor.

In fact, here's some food that you can take with you, even a present. It's a public try intended to rebuke the Judeans. He's making a public example of Jeremiah to advance their political agenda.

And of course, it's not exactly true that Jeremiah is a friend of Babylon because he was warning Judah for their own sake so that they might follow the Lord and repent of their sins. But nevertheless, what he was urging them to do to surrender to Babylon was a message that the Babylonians approved.

And so they considered him a friend of Babylon. But even though he's invited to Babylon, Jeremiah's heart remains with the people of God. He does not see it fit to go to Babylon.

So he stays in Judah under the care of Gedaliah the son of Ike, son of Shaphan. Now, we keep reading that, right? It's a mouthful to read. Gedaliah the son of Ike, son of Shaphan.

[12 : 27] But does that ring a bell at all as we've gone through this book of Jeremiah? Because Gedaliah's genealogy is given here because it's significant. He's the grandson of Shaphan who, as you might recall, is the head of the noble family who are frequently found throughout the book of Jeremiah, sheltering the prophet and protecting him using their political leverage.

Shaphan was the secretary of King Josiah during his reforms. And his family appears to have been a godly, faithful people who did their best to shield Jeremiah. So, for example, in Jeremiah 26, 24, it said, The hand of Ike, the son of Shaphan, was with Jeremiah so that he was not given over to the people to be put to death.

And in Jeremiah 36, 10 and 26, another one of Shaphan's sons, Gemariah, urges King Jehoiakim not to burn Jeremiah's scroll. And here in chapter 40, Shaphan's grandson and Ike's son, Gedaliah, takes charge of Jeremiah and ensures his survival after the fall of Jerusalem.

Isn't this a great example of God's providence in our lives? Nebuchadnezzar could have chosen from dozens of royal heirs and nobility, but of them all, he chooses Gedaliah, the grandson of Shaphan.

What luck, you might say, for Jeremiah, but this is not luck. It's the providence of God. Even in the small detail, scripture reveals God's gracious and provident care for his servants.

[13 : 55] Do you know that this is how God cares for all of his children? Even in the tumult of war and captivity, the Lord, your God, is sovereign.

There's no corner of the earth where his power does not reach, and there's no event in history, no detail in your own life that does not follow the course of God's will.

God cares for us. He's watching over us. And under Gedaliah's governorship, the remnant of Judah begins to come together again. Verses 7 to 8, read with me.

It says, When all the captains of the forces in the open country and their men heard that the king of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah, the son of Aikim, governor in the land, and had committed to him men, women, and children, those of the poorest of the land who had not been taken into exile to Babylon, they went to Gedaliah at Mizpah.

Ishmael, the son of Nethaniah, Johanan, the son of Kariah, Sariah, the son of Tamimuth, the sons of Ephi, the Netaphathite, Jezaniah, the son of Macathite, they and their men.

[14 : 56] Now the captains of the Judean army and the people under their supervision had, some of them had managed to escape the Babylonian army. And when they hear of Gedaliah's appointment, they all rally back to him in Mizpah.

And in verses 9 to 10, Gedaliah assures them that he will represent them faithfully to the Babylonians. And he assures them that they will be safe if they continue to resume their life, resume their farming to restore some normalcy to their life after becoming conquered by Babylon.

And not only the Judeans that were scattered throughout Judah, but also those refugees from Moab and Edom, they come back to gather under Gedaliah's leadership. And he says, in verse 12, that they gathered wine and summer fruits in great abundance.

So the people are resuming their life and even though the war was devastating, the conditions now seem to be improving. They're doing better. And Gedaliah seems to be unifying the people.

But there's a plot twist here at the end of verse 8. Some of the captains of the forces that had joined Gedaliah were named at the end of verse 8 because they are the main characters in this plot twist which now unfolds in verses 13 to 15.

[16 : 06] Read with me. Now Johanan, the son of Kareah, and all the leaders of the forces in the open country came to Gedaliah at Mizpah and said to him, Do you know that Baalus, the king of the Ammonites, has sent Ishmael, the son of Nethaniah, to take your life?

But Gedaliah, the son of Ahikim, would not believe them. Then Johanan, the son of Kareah, spoke secretly to Gedaliah at Mizpah. Please, let me go and strike down Ishmael, the son of Nethaniah, and no one will know it.

Why should he take your life so that all the Judeans who are gathered about you would be scattered and the remnant of Judah would perish? So one of the military commanders, Johanan, son of Kareah, informs Gedaliah of Ishmael's conspiracy and he offers a preemptive strike to get rid of this would-be assassin.

And Johanan seems to understand the importance of Gedaliah as a unifying figure because he was an effective leader that was bringing back the people of Judah. And if he were assassinated, the remnant would be scattered again and they would be at risk of perishing altogether.

But Gedaliah doesn't believe Ahikim and he said to Johanan, son of Kareah, you shall not do this thing for you are speaking falsely of Ishmael.

[17 : 26] Gedaliah does not believe Johanan, and instead believes better of Ishmael. We don't get too many details here on their motivations and why, but we may have some clues in the next chapter.

So turn with me to chapter 41, verse 1. It says, In the seventh month, Ishmael, the son of Nethaniah, son of Elishamah, of the royal family, one of the chief officers of the king, came with ten men to Gedaliah, the son of Ahikim, at Mizpah.

So we learn here that Ishmael came from a very prominent Judean family. His grandfather was one of the chief officers of the king. In fact, he was of royal blood.

So for these reasons, Ishmael may have felt that he had better claimed to be ruler of Judah than Gedaliah and may have resented the fact that Gedaliah was appointed by the foreign intruders.

We can't know for sure, but it's a possibility. But Gedaliah, on the other hand, is very trusting of Ishmael. Why could that be? Elishamah, Ishmael's grandfather that's named here, was the secretary of King Joachim of Judah who served with Gemariah, the son of Shaphan.

[18 : 32] So Ishmael's grandfather was a close colleague of Gedaliah's uncle and they may have already had prior relationship because of that connection and perhaps that familiarity predisposed Gedaliah to trust Ishmael and accuse Johanan of speaking falsely of Ishmael.

And since Johanan and Ishmael were kind of both captains of the forces, rival leaders jockeying for more influence within this new Judean coalition, Gedaliah may have suspected Johanan of simply wanting to eliminate a rival.

But Ishmael betrays Gedaliah's trust and it says in verses 2-3, as they ate bread together there at Mizpah, Ishmael, the son of Nethaniah and the ten men with him rose up and struck down Gedaliah, the son of Aikim, son of Shaphan, with the sword and killed him whom the king of Babylon had appointed governor in the land.

Ishmael also struck down all the Judeans who were with Gedaliah at Mizpah and the Chaldean soldiers who happened to be there. The stories written in scripture don't give us unnecessary details and everything written here is there to tell us something because it says that the assassination took place as they ate bread together.

That highlights how shameful and a hateful act this was because in the ancient Near East hospitality was taken extremely seriously and the mutual trust and obligation between the host and guest was a sacred bond.

[19 : 58] But Ishmael betrays him while Gedaliah was providing for him with his own food and protecting him under his own roof. Gedaliah, Ishmael rises up to strike Gedaliah and down with the sword.

And sin always begets more sin and his murder here leads to a string of others because he kills all the Judeans that were with Gedaliah at Mizpah and all the Babylonian soldiers who happened to be there.

Presumably because he wanted to eliminate all witnesses so that the word doesn't get out to the Babylonian empire that he has done this. And that's a big problem, right? Because the narrator reminds us that Ishmael killed Gedaliah who was whom the king of Babylon had appointed governor in the land.

So not only is this a gross violation of that ancient Near Eastern trust and the laws of hospitality, this was treachery and rebellion against the Babylonian rule which was sure to bring swift reprisal from the Babylonians.

But Ishmael's crime doesn't end there. Verses 4-5 tells us that on the day after the murder of Gedaliah, before anyone knew of it, 80 men arrived from Shechem and Shiloh and Samaria with their beard shaven and their clothes torn and their bodies gashed, bringing grain offerings and incense to present at the temple of the Lord.

[21 : 20] So Shechem, Shiloh, and Samaria are all kind of centers of worship in northern Israel. Israel, and that their origin as well as the fact that they brought grain offerings and incense to present the temple of the Lord, tell us that they're worshipers of the true God.

They're pilgrims and they've come to worship and they have come mourning because it says that their beards are shaven, their clothes are torn, their bodies are gashed. They're mourning the destruction of the temple for the fall of Jerusalem and they're coming to pledge their ongoing allegiance and faithfulness to God.

And when you get these innocent guests coming, Ishmael acts like a complete snake. Read verses 6 to 8 with me. And Ishmael, the son of Nethaniah, came out from Mizpah to meet them, weeping as he came.

As he met them, he said to them, come in to Gedaliah, the son of Ahicham. Ishmael greets them in Gedaliah's name, probably because these pilgrims had come to see Gedaliah, which shows that Gedaliah, like his father and grandfather before him, was a worshiper of the true God and they saw him, for that reason, as a safe figure.

So Gedaliah, so he uses, invokes Gedaliah's name and earns their trust by faking his mourning. But when they came into the city, it says, Ishmael, the son of Nethaniah and the men with him, slaughtered them and cast them into a cistern.

[22 : 40] But there were ten men among them who said to Ishmael, do not put us to death for we have stores of wheat, barley, oil and honey hidden in the fields. So he refrained and did not put them to death with their companions.

He spares only ten of them, not because he has mercy on them, but because of his greed. He wants to acquire their hidden wheat, barley, oil and honey.

And then it tells us in verse 10, Ishmael took captive all the rest of the people who were in Mizpah, the king's daughters and all the people who were left in Mizpah, whom Nebuchadnezzar, the captain of the guard, had committed to Gedaliah, the son of Ahicham.

Ishmael, the son of Nethaniah, took them captive and set out to cross over to the Ammonites. So Nebuchadnezzar then had entrusted certain prominent people to Gedaliah, including the king's daughters and as we saw in chapter 40, Jeremiah.

But now those people whom Nebuchadnezzar had freed, Ishmael takes captive again and likely fearing the Babylonian retaliation, he begins to flee again to the territory of the Ammonites.

[23 : 45] Ishmael is a classic example of human defiance against God. As a proud citizen of Judah, Ishmael resisted the Babylonian rule over Judah, even though God had clearly revealed through his prophet that the Babylonian invasion was his judgment, which they ought to submit to.

As a proud descendant of royalty, Ishmael resisted Gedaliah's governorship of Judah, even though he was a godly and clearly effective and unifying leader.

This is how we often respond to God's will in our lives too, isn't it? We might not murder anyone in retaliation, but we nonetheless get angry with God and with others.

We defy God by resisting his will and disobeying his commands. We think we deserve better than what God has given us. When we don't get the job or promotion that we thought we deserved.

When we don't get into the school or the program that we thought we deserved. When we don't get the good night of sleep that we thought we deserved because of a crying baby. When we don't get the quiet morning with a cup of coffee and the Bible in hand.

[24 : 55] when we don't get a quiet evening to relax after a long day at work with a good book or a good show that we thought we deserved. In short, when we disapprove of the twists and turns of life, the dips and bumps of our lives, we get sullen and angry.

We take our anger out on other people, on other things, but really we're angry at God who in his sovereign will fit fit to send these our way.

How we handle suffering and other undesirable circumstances of our lives, whether with humble submission or with prideful defiance, reveals our true character.

Whether it is agreeable to us or not, we must obey the voice of the Lord and that's for our good. Now look at what happens to Ishmael. Verses 11 to 12. But when Johanan, the son of Cariah, and all the leaders of the forces with him heard of all the evil that Ishmael, the son of Nethaniah, had done, they took all their men and went to fight against Ishmael, the son of Nethaniah.

When Johanan and his soldiers intercept Ishmael in Gibeon, verses 13 to 14 tell us that all the people that had been taken captive by Ishmael rejoiced to see this, I guess, their savior in Johanan and they defected to him so that Ishmael, instead of returning to the Ammonites triumphantly with his spoils and captives, barely managed to escape with only eight men running for their lives.

[26 : 25] And Johanan then recovers all the people that Ishmael had taken captive and brings them, it says, to Gareth-Chimhem near Bethlehem. And it says in verses 17 to 18 that they were intending to go to Egypt because of the Chaldeans.

For they were afraid of them because Ishmael, the son of Nethaniah, had struck down Gedali, the son of Ikem, whom the king of Babylon had made governor over the land. Even though they themselves had not killed Gedaliah and rebelled against Babylon, it looked like they had because of what Ishmael had done.

So instead of waiting in Judah to find out what the Babylonians would do to them, they figured they'd be better off fleeing to Egypt. And we can deduce that they were already set on going to Egypt by where they went because Bethlehem, where they went, is six miles southwest of Jerusalem, well on their way to Egypt already.

And that brings us to chapter 42 and my second point, denial, which is another way that sinful human beings typically respond when God's will is not agreeable to them. But first, in verses 1 to 3, we see a hopeful development.

It says, Then all the commanders of the forces and Johanan, the son of Kereah, and Jezaniah, the son of Hoshiah, and all the people from the least to the greatest, came near and said to Jeremiah the prophet, Let our plea for mercy come before you and pray to the Lord your God for us for all this remnant because we are left with but a few as your eyes see us, that the Lord your God may show us the way we should go and the thing that we should do.

[28 : 03] So while at a rest stop in Bethlehem on their way to Egypt, the remnant of Judah determined it would be best for them to consult Jeremiah since this prominent prophet was already with them.

So all the commanders and all the people from the least to the greatest, it says, the whole community, they plead with Jeremiah, come together and inquire of God to find out where they should go and what they should do.

So this is a big, weighty decision for them because there's only a few of them left and they're afraid that the remnant, all the people of Judah, would perish altogether. And as they are pleading with him, Jeremiah tells them in verse 4, I have heard you, behold, I will pray to the Lord your God according to your request and whatever the Lord answers you, I will tell you, I will keep nothing back from you.

And then the people respond by expressing their sincerity and they vow to obey whatever the Lord says. In verses 5 to 6, may the Lord be a true and faithful witness against us if we do not act according to all the word with which the Lord your God sends you to us.

Whether it is good or bad, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God to whom we are sending you that it may be well with us when we obey the voice of the Lord our God.

[29 : 18] So when making a pledge to do something, it was common in this culture to call people as a witness against them should they fail to do that. And so if I don't do such and such, he will be a witness against me.

Now when you wanted to be extra emphatic, you would call someone to be a faithful witness. If I don't do such and such, he will be a faithful witness against me. You see that throughout scripture. But here the people are even more emphatic than that.

They say, if we don't do this, may the Lord be a true and faithful witness against us if we do not act according to all the word with which the Lord your God sends you to us. And they say that whether it's good or bad, they will obey the voice of the Lord.

Whether we like it or not, whether it seems good to us or not, no matter what the Lord says, we will obey. It's encouraging to hear them say that, right, after all the unfaithful and disobedience we've seen throughout the book of Jeremiah.

It seems like finally people have learned their lesson after the fall of Jerusalem and are now about to sincerely obey the Lord and follow him. But God keeps them waiting for a little while.

[30 : 22] In verse 7, it tells us that at the end of 10 days, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah. This is instructive for us because it shows us once again that Jeremiah was a true prophet.

Jeremiah could have manipulated this situation by simply telling them his personal preference and styling it as the word of the Lord. But he doesn't do that.

He waits on the Lord and listens until he hears from him and it takes 10 days. Especially here in Cambridge and nowadays, I feel like it's rare to find people really earnestly praying and waiting on the Lord.

I think sometimes it's because we've let our hearts get too busy. We're hurried. We've become too preoccupied with our own purposes and priorities that we don't wait to find out what God wants.

Other times, we don't wait on God because we no longer believe that God speaks. We think that we're on our own in our decision making so we create a chart, weigh the pros and cons, make a decision using our pragmatic wisdom.

[31 : 38] I'm not saying you shouldn't do those things. Making a chart is great. Weighing the pros and cons is great. Using our practical wisdom is great. And yes, God can and he does use those processes to lead us.

but what about waiting on the voice of the Lord? God still speaks. And sometimes his will confounds the best of human wisdom.

The same Spirit of God who spoke to prophet Jeremiah now indwells every follower of Jesus Christ and we can hear from him.

People often ask me, how do I hear from God? How can I recognize his voice? The Bible doesn't explicitly answer that question because it was never supposed to be mysterious.

Voice recognition is a pretty remarkable thing. Nowadays, we have caller ID on all of our phones so we don't really have to use that anymore. But back in the day when you were using landlines, people would call and you would pick up and say hello and as soon as you hear their hello, you could tell who it was because you recognized the person's voice.

[32 : 55] Our voices are unique, right? That's why voice recognition works with Siri and Google Assistant and such, right? And we learn someone's voice how? By spending time with that person.

By getting to know that person through repetition, hearing that person's voice again and again. It's the same in our relationship with God. Galatians 5.25 speaks of keeping in step with the Spirit.

We're supposed to walk with Him, keep up with Him. 1 Corinthians 2.14-16 teaches that a Christian is taught by the Spirit of God and therefore have the mind of Christ.

When you walk closely with Christ, when you seek God's mind regularly in His Word and Scriptures, when you're accustomed to obeying the impressions of the Spirit on your heart, you come to have the mind of Christ so that you think like Him.

You know what He would think or say or do in a given situation. In John, Jesus says, I am the good shepherd. In John 10, He says that when the shepherd has brought out all his own, he goes before them and the sheep follow Him for they know His voice.

[34 : 08] A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from Him for they do not know the voice of strangers. There's an incredible YouTube video I saw recently.

It's entitled, Do Sheep Only Obey Their Master's Voice? I guess some of you guys seen that. I don't know. It takes place at a farm in Norway. Several strangers try to mimic the call of the shepherd and try to bring the flock of sheep back to the fold.

Several visitors attempt it, but as they're trying their best, the sheep completely ignore them. They don't even lift their head, they just keep eating the grass. It's really entertaining to watch.

And then after they've all taken their turns, the shepherd calls out to them. They immediately look up, turn their heads toward the shepherd. They start bawling in response, and then they all run over to the fold.

It's amazing to see. It's almost moving to watch it. Yeah. And Jesus said, My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.

[35 : 20] You may not hear the audible voice of God, but God speaks through his word. God speaks through his spirit, and God often uses his people, the church, to speak as well.

Are you familiar with the voice of the Lord? Is it your habit to wait on the voice of the Lord? It was a good thing that Jeremiah waited, because God's word challenged in this case their common sense.

Jeremiah says in verses 10 to 12, If you will remain in this land, then I will build you up and not pull you down. I will plant you and not pluck you up, for I relent of the disaster that I did to you.

Do not fear the king of Babylon, of whom you are afraid. Do not fear him, declares the Lord, for I am with you to save you and to deliver you from his hand. I will grant you mercy, that he may have mercy on you, and let you remain in your own land.

It's a wonderful promise. God says he has relented of the disaster that he brought to them. His justice has been satisfied, and he's no longer pouring out his wrath upon them, and if they obey him now, the same promise that God had made to the exiles will be theirs.

[36 : 30] They will not be plucked out, they will be planted and restored to the land. But, Jeremiah continues in verses 13 to 18, if you say, we will not remain in this land, disobeying the voice of the Lord your God, and saying, no, we will go to the land of Egypt, where we shall not see war, or hear the sound of the trumpet, or be hungry for bread, and we will dwell there.

Then, hear the word of the Lord, O remnant of Judah. Thus, says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, if you set your faces to enter Egypt and go to live there, then the sword that you fear shall overtake you there in the land of Egypt, and the famine of which you are afraid shall follow close after you to Egypt, and there you shall die.

All the men who set their faces to go to Egypt to live there shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence. They shall have no remnant or survivor from the disaster that I will bring upon them.

The people were considering fleeing to Egypt because they feared that the remnant of Judah would perish. They would not survive if they stayed in the land because of the Babylonian retaliation. But Jeremiah warns them instead that if you flee to Egypt, what you fear will exactly happen to you, and there will be no remnant or survivor left from the disaster that I will bring upon those who flee to Egypt.

And as Jeremiah is relaying this word of God to them, he must be looking at their faces or something and seeing their disapproval or disbelief because he anticipates what their response will be in verses 19 to 22.

[38 : 06] Jeremiah says, The Lord has said to you, O remnant of Judah, do not go to Egypt. Know for a certainty that I have warned you this day that you have gone astray at the cost of your lives.

For you sent me to the Lord your God saying, Pray for us, the Lord our God, and whatever the Lord our God says, declare to us and we will do it. And I have this day declared it to you, but you have not obeyed the voice of the Lord your God in anything that he has sent me to tell you.

Now therefore know for a certainty that you shall die by disorder, by famine, and by pestilence in the place where you desire to go live. These Judeans just did not see this coming. They were so sure that God's word would agree with their own view of things that they had vowed to obey God no matter what, whether for good or bad.

But it turns out that they were not actually prepared to obey God at all costs. They were only prepared to obey God as long as his word agreed with their own. They wanted God to confirm their own opinions, not contradict them.

And so they respond tragically. They don't respond. They disobey the voice of the Lord. In fact, they accuse Jeremiah of telling a lie.

[39 : 28] And they accuse Baruch, his scribe, of setting him up, of pressuring him to do this. And at the end of, in verse seven, it says, and they came into the land of Egypt, for they did not obey the voice of the Lord, and they arrived at Tephenu.

They fell into denial. They were so persuaded that going to Egypt was the only way to ensure their safety, their mind was completely closed off to any other possibility. and they don't dare say that God is wrong, but they deny that that's what God really said.

And note the repetition of the phrase the voice of the Lord here. In verse four and verse seven, it says the voice of the Lord, they did not obey the voice of the Lord. Earlier in chapter 40, verse 3, Nebuchadrezzar accused the people of Judah of sinning against the Lord and not obeying his voice.

And in chapter 42, the phrase voice of the Lord was repeated four times and here again twice in short, in a few verses of chapter 43. So this is a major theme of these chapters.

God has spoken, his voice has been heard, but the people of Judah disobey. We too often ask God for direction when we are at crossroads of our lives.

[40 : 46] We ask him what his will for us really is. But perhaps the more important question to ask is whether or not we are prepared to obey the voice of the Lord.

It's all too familiar, isn't it? Our young man says, I will follow you God, wherever you go Lord. I will become a pastor or missionary to serve you and I'm going to win the world back for you.

He says this because he thinks that ministry will make much of him. Because he thinks he's going to get a large following right away. Speak at conferences, write books.

But when God entrusts a small church to him and instead of widespread acclaim he receives frequent criticism from his own members, he calls it quits because that's not what he had signed up for.

We often say, just say the word God, just tell me clearly and I'll do it. but when obeying God's revealed will in scripture makes us unpopular, when we find its teaching disagreeable to our sensibilities, we rationalize it or simply ignore it.

[42 : 11] Like Azariah and Johanan and the rest of the quote insolent men of Judah, we deny God's word. But whether it is agreeable to us or not, we must obey the voice of the Lord.

And because the Judean remnant did not obey the voice of the Lord, they will perish. Throughout these few chapters we saw a recurring fear that the remnant of Judah would perish forever.

In chapter 40, 15, Johanan asked to take out Ishmael ahead of time because he worried that if Gedaliah is murdered that the remnant of Judah would be no more.

In chapter 42, verse 2, the remnant, after being recovered from Ishmael, they said to Jeremiah, let our plea for mercy come before you and pray to the Lord your God for us, for all this remnant, because we are left with but a few.

And this is because the people who were made in Judah believed that they were the future of God's people. And because of that, they believed it was absolutely necessary that they survive for God's plan of salvation to unfold.

[43 : 15] But their return to Egypt meant that they would be wiped out. So then is that the end of God's people? Did God's plan to redeem a people for himself and to establish the kingdom of God here on earth fail?

That's the question we're left with at this part of the passage. But hope springs from a seemingly hopeless place. even though the remnant in Judah will die off because they flee to Egypt.

God's plan to redeem a people for himself continues through the Judean exiles in Babylon, as God had promised in chapter 24. Matthew 1, 12 to 16, tells us how this promise was fulfilled.

Remember, Jeconiah was the king of Judah that was exiled to Babylon. And after the deportation to Babylon, Jeconiah was the father of Sheothiah, and Sheothiah the father of Zerubbabel, and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Aachim, and Aachim the father of Eliud, and Eliud the father of Elesser, and Elesser the father of Maz Esther, and cose tom the father of Jacob, and grave the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ, the anointed one, the Messiah, the Savior King that was to come to establish the kingdom of God, to lead the people of God.

Jesus is that promised king and what did the Judean people fail to do for themselves because even the exiles of Babylon will continue to sin against the Lord and be unfaithful to him.

[45 : 07] They will not heed the voice of the Lord but God sends his only son, Jesus Christ, as a man to live the life of perfect obedience, heeding the voice of the Lord perfectly and he, the perfect son of man and son of God, dies in the place of sinners like us who have refused to heed the voice of the Lord and he dies on the cross for our sins so that we can once again have the path to enter the kingdom of God through him.

We were captives to sin and Satan, exiles in foreign territory but King Jesus calls us home and it's by aligning ourselves to him, submitting to him in faith, that's how we enter the kingdom of God.

So let me ask you, have you heard and followed the voice of this king? Are you attuned to the voice of the Lord? Please take a moment, feel free to close your eyes to reflect on that question.

what is the Lord saying to you this morning through his word? Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.