

Speaks  
August 6, 2023  
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Jeremiah 36:19-31

Opening: This week in our company I saw an email from one of our VPs with the words: “READ AND HEED” at the top in large red letters. The word “heed” means to “pay attention,” but more than that, “pay attention and act on a warning.”<sup>i</sup> Sometimes we receive messages that we ignore at our own peril. We must pay attention, pay heed, or pay a price down the road. What are some examples of that kind of message?

I thought of titling this study: *“Unheeded warnings or careful obedience - the smell of ashes, or the taste of honey.”* You’ll understand that last part shortly.

Jeremiah 36 records the first time God had the Prophet Jeremiah commit his messages for Judah and Israel to writing. In verses two and three God said, “Get a scroll, and write down all my messages against Israel, Judah, and the other nations. Begin with the first message back in the days of Josiah, and write down every message, right up to the present time.”<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the people of Judah will repent when they hear again all the terrible things I have planned for them. Then I will be able to forgive their sins and wrongdoings.”<sup>ii</sup>

Jeremiah called for his assistant and scribe Baruch (*BEHR uhk*) to write down all the messages and warnings in summary form on a scroll. Jeremiah had been banned from the temple because of his prophecies so he said to Baruch, (verse six) “...go to the Temple on the next day of fasting, and read the messages from the Lord that I have had you write on this scroll. Read them so the people who are there from all over Judah will hear them.”<sup>7</sup> Perhaps even yet they will turn from their evil ways and ask the Lord’s forgiveness before it is too late. For the Lord has threatened them with his terrible anger.”<sup>8</sup> Baruch did as Jeremiah told him and read these messages from the Lord to the people at the Temple.<sup>iii</sup>

When the messages were read some of King Jehoiakim’s (*jih HOY uh kim*) officials heard them and were very alarmed. They said, “*We must tell the king what we’ve heard!*” They said to Baruch, “*You and Jeremiah should both hide.*”

Jeremiah and Baruch went to hide and the officials went to see the king. Verse 22:<sup>21</sup> The king sent Jehudi (*jih HYOO digh*) to get the scroll. Jehudi brought it from Elishama’s room and read it to the king as all his officials stood by.<sup>22</sup> It was late autumn, and the king was in a winterized part of the palace, sitting in front of a fire to keep warm.<sup>23</sup> Each time Jehudi finished reading three or four columns, the king took a knife and cut off that section of the scroll. He then threw it into the fire, section by section, until the whole scroll was burned up.<sup>24</sup> Neither the king

nor his attendants showed any signs of fear or repentance at what they heard.  
<sup>25</sup> [His advisors] begged the king not to burn the scroll, [but] he wouldn't listen. <sup>iv</sup>

- What warnings did King Jehoiakim refuse to hear? King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had taken control of Judah, but for three years he allowed Jehoiakim to serve as his “puppet” leader. This was year four and God was giving the king and the people one more chance to repent.
- Verse 29: *“If you don’t repent of your “evil ways” and turn to God, “the king of Babylon [will] destroy this land and empty it of people and animals.”*
- Not only did the king refuse to listen, he destroyed the warning in his fire.
- Instead of obedience to God, unheeded warnings and the smell of ashes.
- You can tear up your tax notices; but one day the IRS will show up.
- You can ignore the doctor’s warnings; but one day illness will take its toll.
- Pay attention, pay heed, or pay a price down the road. Perhaps that should be engraved on every copy of God’s word as a warning.
- The king commanded that Baruch and Jeremiah be arrested, but verse 26 says, “the Lord had hidden them.” God said to Jeremiah (verse 28), <sup>28</sup> “Get another scroll, and write everything again just as you did on the scroll King Jehoiakim burned.” (Verse 32) <sup>32</sup> So Jeremiah took another scroll and dictated again to his secretary, Baruch. He wrote everything that had been on the scroll King Jehoiakim had burned in the fire. Only this time he added much more!
- Through history, evil people have tried to destroy the word of God.
- A historical sidebar. Avoid the “Jefferson Bible.” Late in his life Thomas Jefferson took a razor and cut out parts of the New Testament and pasted them into his own version. The History Channel: *“Using his clippings, the aging third president created a New Testament of his own—one that most Christians would hardly recognize. This Bible was focused only on Jesus, but none of his mystical works. It didn’t include major scenes like the resurrection or ascension to heaven or miracles like turning water into wine or walking on water. Instead, Jefferson’s Bible focused on Jesus as a man of morals, a teacher whose truths were expressed without the help of miracles or the supernatural powers of God.”*<sup>v</sup>
- Stay away from the “Jefferson Bible.”
- Jesus said in **Matthew 24:35 (ESV) — 35** Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.
- Isaiah wrote in **Isaiah 40:8 (ESV) — 8** The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.
- The king thought he could destroy God’s warning but a second notice was coming: (Verse 29) <sup>29</sup> Then say to the king, ‘This is what the Lord says: You burned the scroll because it said the king of Babylon would destroy this land and empty it of people and animals. <sup>30</sup> Now this is what the Lord says about King Jehoiakim of Judah: He will have no heirs to sit on the throne of David. His dead body will be thrown out to lie unburied—exposed to the heat of the day and the frost of the night. <sup>31</sup> I will punish him and his family and his attendants for their sins. I will pour out on them

and on all the people of Jerusalem and Judah all the disasters I promised, for they would not listen to my warnings.’ ”<sup>vi</sup>

- *“This prophecy was fulfilled when, in the eleventh year of Jehoiakim’s reign, he stopped paying tribute to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar responded by besieging Jerusalem. According to [historian] Josephus, Jehoiakim was killed during the siege, and his body was thrown over the city wall.”*<sup>vii</sup>
- Unheeded warnings and the smell of ashes – pay heed or pay the price.
- We read this and shake our heads at this foolish, evil king; but is there a lesson for us today? What about that “taste of honey” I mentioned?
- We are appalled at someone cutting up and burning God’s word. Obviously, anyone who destroys God’s word commits a heinous sin.

**Revelation 22:19 (ESV) — 19** and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

- King Jehoiakim didn’t just edit God’s word; he burned it and paid the price.
- Here is what is convicting to me, is an unread and unheeded Bible essentially the same as one that has been tossed in a fire?
- I own 30+ physical copies of God’s word. At the throne I won’t be able to say to my Heavenly Father, *“I just didn’t know what you wanted me to do.”*
- How can we be sure we don’t ignore God’s word? I’m glad you asked!

**Psalms 119:103–105 (ESV) — 103** How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! **104** Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way. **105** Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

**Psalms 19:9–10 (ESV) — 9** ...the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. **10** More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.

- To avoid the smell of ashes, we need to develop a taste for honey!
- It has been written that in Jesus’ time, as Rabbis began to teach six-year-old Jewish children the scriptures, *“...[o]n the child’s first day of school, the Rabbi gave each one of the new students a small slate which they would eventually use to learn to read and write. He would pour honey on each child’s slate and would have the children run their fingers across the slate and then would have them lick the honey off of their fingers while the Rabbi would say, ‘May the words of God be like honey on your tongue.’”*<sup>viii</sup>
- If God’s word is like honey, how can we develop a taste for His word?
- I have learned that we develop our appetite by what we feed ourselves.
- When Susan and I cleaned up our eating, eliminating almost all sugar, etc., I learned from experience if I start back eating sweets, my cravings for them come back. For my health I don’t want to crave sweets, but in the case of God’s word I need a hunger for the “honey” of His truth.
- If I want to have a hunger for God’s word, I need to taste it daily.
- There is a very practical problem though. **Proverbs 27:7 (ESV) — 7** One who is full loathes honey, but to one who is hungry everything bitter is sweet. The Message paraphrase: **7** When you’ve stuffed yourself, you refuse dessert; when you’re starved, you could eat a horse.

- Why don't we crave God's word? We fill our minds with so much "junk food" content we have no taste for the "honey" of God's word.
- Question: Is that "junk food" content restricted to things like pornography? How can (even "good") content can become "junk food" for our souls?
- Even if our content itself is not necessarily bad it can become "junk food" if we consume more of it than we do God's word.
- Peter compared God's word to milk for a baby: **1 Peter 2:2–3 (ESV) —2** Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— **3** if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.
- In verse one, look at the "bad food" he warned us to avoid: **1** So get rid of all evil behavior...deceit, hypocrisy, jealousy, and all unkind speech.
- Sometimes our "junk food" is a diet of bad attitudes and an unloving spirit.
- Who wants to read the Bible and be convicted of those things?!
- So, how do we fix this? Developing a taste for what is good for us instead of what is bad for us starts with intentionally consuming what is good.
- It might taste a little dry at first [start in Psalms, Philippians, or John not in Leviticus!] but as those verses begin to speak to our hearts and our circumstances, we will develop a taste for the "honey" of God's word.
- Just like that Häagen-Dazs® calls your name from the freezer, God's word will become so sweet we will hunger for it.
- When we miss reading it we will feel the difference.
- Thoughts?

So, What's the Takeaway?

- *"Unheeded warnings or careful obedience? The smell of ashes, or the taste of honey?"* We know what Jehoiakim chose. What about us?
- No one in our group is burning Bibles; but are we reading and heeding it?
- Jerry Vines said, *"An unread Bible is like food uneaten, a love letter never read, a buried sword, a road map unstudied, gold never mined"*<sup>x</sup>
- Scripture says God's word is like honey. Jesus said, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.' "
- James compared God's word to a mirror.<sup>x</sup> We are told that as England's Queen Elizabeth I aged, her appearance changed terribly. *"It is known...that she contracted smallpox in 1562 which left her face scarred. She took to wearing white lead makeup to cover the scars. In later life, she suffered the loss of her hair and her teeth, and [reportedly] in the last few years of her life, she refused to have a mirror in any of her rooms."*<sup>x1</sup>
- Sometimes we ignore God's word because we don't want to look at our lives in the mirror and deal with changes that need to be made.
- Sometimes we don't crave the "sweetness" of His word because we're filling up on junk food content some of which isn't bad, just junk.
- Sometimes our "junk food" is a diet of bad attitudes and an unloving spirit.
- We develop what we crave by what we eat. This week, let's develop a taste for the "honey" of God's word by feasting on it daily.
- Let's pray that as we consume it we will begin to CRAVE it.

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- <sup>i</sup> [https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/heed\\_1](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/heed_1)
- <sup>ii</sup> Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Je 36:2–3). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.
- <sup>iii</sup> Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Je 36:6–8). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.
- <sup>iv</sup> Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Je 36:21–25). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.
- <sup>v</sup> <https://www.history.com/news/thomas-jefferson-bible-religious-beliefs>
- <sup>vi</sup> Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Je 36:28–Je 37). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.
- <sup>vii</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/King-Jehoiakim.html>
- <sup>viii</sup> <https://www.sidneydailynews.com/2018/03/01/may-the-words-of-god-be-like-honey-on-your-tongue/>
- <sup>ix</sup> <https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermon-illustrations/4400/jerry-vines-said-an-unread-bible-is-like-food-by-steve-hereford>
- <sup>x</sup> **James 1:23–24 (ESV) — 23** For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. **24** For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.
- <sup>xi</sup> <https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofEngland/Elizabeth-I-Life-in-Portrait/>