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## Eastminster Worship Services

Sunday, May 16, 2010

### Never the Same: When the Word Changes You

#### *A Severe Mercy*

2 Kings 25:27-30

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Babylon began its dismantling of Judah in 605 B.C. It began its siege of Jerusalem in 587.<sup>1</sup> Jerusalem was destroyed and the people and temple furnishings were deported in 586 B.C.<sup>2</sup> Thirty-seven years later, King Jehoiachin was released from prison.<sup>3</sup> In 2 Kings 25 we see judgment in Judah's fall and grace in Jehoiachin's release. Judgment came. Mercy prevailed. There is always severe mercy.

As a nation, Judah saw what happened to the northern Kingdom of Israel and its ten tribes in the nation's deportation in 722 for its covenant unfaithfulness. God used Assyria as the rod of his anger and the staff of his indignation. But the kings in Judah did not learn from the demise of the northern Kingdom. King Manasseh plunged Judah into gross idolatry. He also paid tribute to the Assyrian kings as a way of receiving protection. And then King Manasseh was carried in chains to Babylon which was a province of Assyria. Later, Babylon rose up and destroyed Assyria in 612 and it then became the rod of God's anger and the staff of his indignation to chasten Judah.

Josiah began reform in Judah, but the kings who followed him nullified his reforms. King Jehoahaz brought the land and nation to utter ruin. His brother Jehoiachim continued Jehoahaz's horrendous policies and disregard for God. Jehoiachim did evil in the sight of God. He was deported and died in disgrace. His young son, Jehoiachin, at age eighteen, was placed on the throne. Jehoiachin was evil like his father.

God warned Judah by the example of the northern kingdom. God warned Judah by the preaching of his prophets, particularly Isaiah and Micah that judgment would come and the instrument of God's judgment would be Babylon.

Judgment arrived. In 605 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar came the first time. In 598 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar came the

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<sup>1</sup>2 Kings 25:1-3

<sup>2</sup>2 Kings 25:4-26

<sup>3</sup>2 Kings 25:27-30

second time. And in 587 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar came the third time; and then he didn't have to come anymore. For in 586, Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple, the city and the nation. The Jews were a people in exile.

Nebuchadnezzar took King Jehoiachin captive to Babylon. And Jehoiachin remained a prisoner in Babylon for thirty-seven years.

After thirty-seven years, Jehoiachin was released during King Evil-Merodach's accession year amnesty. The Babylonian king literally "lifted up his head from prison." The Babylonian king spoke kindly to Jehoiachin and gave him a seat of honor higher than those of other kings who were with him in Babylon. Evil-Merodach ate regularly with Jehoiachin and gave him a regular allowance.

Was Jehoiachin's release good news or bad news for the people in exile? All that the Kings of Israel and Judah had ever promised in the way of a future for the exilic readers was that if they repented their lives in exile would be more bearable.<sup>4</sup> Underneath this negative message of sin and well deserved punishment, a quieter voice had been speaking a more hopeful word. Do not forget the unending reign of Jerusalem promised to David and his descendants. God had promised an everlasting kingdom; an established throne forever. God made that promise and it had not been repudiated.<sup>5</sup> God's promise does not rest on human obedience or repentance.

There is always severe mercy. God's kingdom was established forever with David and his descendants. It was fulfilled with the coming of Jesus Christ in his earthly obedience, death on the cross and resurrection from the dead.

As followers of Jesus, we know that the final judgment comes at the return of Jesus Christ to earth. Until then, we know that sin is destructive and its consequences are devastating. So whether we gossip, hoard, lie, cheat, fornicate, commit adultery, embezzle, murder, covet, place other gods before God and the like, if we confess our sin God is faithful and just and he cleanses us from all unrighteousness. Ah, but what happens when we ignore confession and repentance?

Consider three things this day. First, no judgment of God ever comes without announcement. For those who never believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, disbelief leads to eternal damnation. For those who do believe, unrepentant sin leads to devastating consequences. Second, when judgment comes there is still time to repent. No matter how devastating the consequences of sin are, lives can be restored. And third, the sin of man

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<sup>4</sup>1 Kings 8:46-50

<sup>5</sup>2 Kings 8:19; 1 Kings 11:36; 15:54

cannot frustrate the sovereignty of God. No matter how sinful man is, God's purposes will be fulfilled.

Until the final judgment, God's mercy is available. "Who is Jesus Christ to you? Lord, liar or lunatic?"  
Until the final judgment, God's mercy is available. Like the parable of the persistent widow,<sup>6</sup> God brings about justice for his chosen ones. There is always severe mercy. Let us pray!

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<sup>6</sup>Luke 18:1-8