

## ON THE WAY

### **Jeremiah 31:31-34**

#### **Intro**

This morning we hear a truth that will come.

But our second passage reminds us that we aren't there yet.

I know, you have those two lines out there and some of you are thinking, 'so are we able to skip the sermon today...you know, since we aren't there yet?'

No! Of course not! And it's not because I want to hear myself talk.

Instead, it's because there are some reminders that we need to be cognizant of as we live in the world.

So here's where we start: God isn't done yet. It is clear to anyone who is willing to pay attention (and that is absolutely the case of the prophet Jeremiah) that writing the expectations of the God down (the 10 Commandments), or hearing the law of the Lord on a regular basis (through worship), has not led the people to actually following the direction of God on a consistent basis.

So what do you do when seeing and hearing isn't enough?

Go for the heart: the prophet is told that the people of God will have the promises of God written upon their hearts and when that takes place, not only will the people know, they will follow. The scripture reads this way.

### **Jeremiah 31:31-34**

31 The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. <sup>32</sup>It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. <sup>33</sup>But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. <sup>34</sup>No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the Lord', for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

### **II Timothy 3:14-4:5**

#### **Intro**

But are we there yet? Are we to the point where the law of the Lord is upon our hearts so that not only do we know it...but we follow it?

We all know that the answer is 'no'. We look around at the world, we look at our lives and while we may be able to proclaim how God wants us to live, there are way too many days when that simply doesn't happen.

This reality was already understood in the days of the Apostles and they provide council as to how to move forward in that environment.

But will we hear it? Or will our ears instead itch for what we want to hear? The scripture reads this way.

### **II Timothy 3:14-4:5**

<sup>14</sup>But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, <sup>15</sup>and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>16</sup>All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup>so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

<sup>4</sup>In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: <sup>2</sup>proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. <sup>3</sup>For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, <sup>4</sup>and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. <sup>5</sup>As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.

### **'On the Way'**

This past week I was able to chat with the kids of the Nursery School for our monthly 'Visit with Pastor Ryan' fieldtrip to the sanctuary. It started a little like this: how does God want us to act? Does God want us to be kind or to be mean (and all the kids said...)? Does God want us to be loving or to be angry (any guesses on how they answered that one: exactly!)?

Now here was the next question: 'how do we know that? How do we know that God wants us to be kind and loving?' All of a sudden, all of those kids who were right there chomping at the bit to be able to answer the guy whom they had come to visit grew quiet.

But after a few seconds of slightly awkward silence, I heard the voice of Sophie Hoopes call out, 'The Bible!' I responded to her, 'that's absolutely right!', at which point about five of her classmates heads shot around to look at her with wonderment (how did she know the answer to that question?!).

Why do we know what we know about how God longs for us to live with Him and how that should be emulated in who we live with one another?

Because 'All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.'

So if we know that's true, then why do we struggle so much with doing the things that God would have us do, with being the people God would have us be?

Well, let's go back to the source for all things that will equip us for every good work for some direction.

What do we hear just a few verses in II Timothy? 'For the time is coming when people... having itching ears, ... will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires.'

This truth is able to hit the mark in a couple of ways.

First, it sets the Word of God as one of the sources of that we draw from. Not the source...just a source.

Think about it: when our lives start to enter into a space of doubt, questioning, or confusion, how high up on the list does the Word of God or even your connection to the Almighty rank?

Too often we know that the answer is not near high enough.

And then on the flip side, when life is going along swimmingly, to whom do we give credit and praise? Is God at the top of that list? Or do we instead look to ourselves or other worldly influences for any success that may be transpiring?

Again, too often we know the answer to that one too.

Our ears are itching and we look for whatever might be able to successfully scratch it.

We look to people who say they will help us.

We look to money or influence which we are told will address the needs that we have.

We look to whatever has helped other people and follow that...at least until we find that doesn't work as well for us and then we go looking for the next thing. God might be in there, but God and His Word become one of the proverbial books on the shelf and God becomes a resource that we draw upon for our wants as opposed to the foundational source upon which everything else resides.

And that very much points to the other way that this verse from Timothy speaks truth: we are accumulating resources that speak to our desires. We have fallen into the long line of those who have come before who are showing through their actions that our wants take precedence over the needs that God has articulated through His Word (be kind; show and share love).

So what do we do about it? If we recognize that there is an issue that sets us into conflict with how God would have us live, and we know (at some level) that we need to amend that conflict between ourselves and God, what are we to do?

Well, the first thing that you do is own it. It shows up in the liturgy every week but just because it's familiar doesn't mean that it's devoid of value. We need to acknowledge before God and, as the case may be, one another, how we have sought for our own needs first and have relegated God and His Word to something that we seek out when we want to instead of the One whom we seek out because we know that is where we need to start.

So there's confession.

But if the next part isn't there, then we end up sliding right back into those old habits that left us in conflict with God in the first place: we need to work on creating or as the case may be, developing a community where we actually encourage one another to go to God, to trust God, to believe in God even when that trust is not resulting in what we wanted.

Did you catch what I said? We need to work on creating and developing our community.

Because here's the thing: just because we show up and sit next to one another doesn't mean that we know one another. And even in the cases where we know one another, do we lean upon our Lord first, trusting in the promises that are contained in His Word?

Look, this is not an easy thing to chat about (especially when you're the guy up front) but I need your help to mold this house of worship into a family of faith, a family of faith that leans upon God, looks to His Word, and cares for one another in such a way that we get ever closer to living lives that reflect God's law upon our hearts.

For example, in this particular place, there was a time a generation or two ago where when someone wasn't in worship for a couple of weeks, what would happen? A call would be made; a note would be sent.

However, as we have moved into whatever era we have decided to call the current one, when someone isn't here, we make the assumption that there off doing something else, or at the very least, it's their business why they aren't there so why bother them, and nothing is done. We need to move away from that because that is not how God would have us live...together. But I need your help; consistory needs your help. Will you join me on the way, by acknowledging those steps that we have ventured down that are not of God and instead follow

His Word, even a little more closely, by reaching out and caring for one another by showing, literally showing that we care.

There's also the reality that just because we sit next to someone doesn't mean that we know what's going on in their life: either good or bad. We need to walk with one another in such a way that we feel, even just a little bit more comfortable sharing the stories of our life. I need your help: will you join me on the way? And if you're looking around this space and thinking to yourself, 'I don't know how to plug in like that here', then please come and talk with me, and if there isn't one of the existing outlets that makes sense, then let's create one.

No matter what, we need to create a community, a family, that leans upon God's Word and implores those who are around us to do the same. Does that mean that there won't be disagreements? Of course not! Even the Apostles disagreed...and they knew Jesus: are we so vain as to think that we've figured it all out? Yeah, neither am I.

But I need your help. Will you join me on the way, the way that follows God even just a little bit more closely, and encourages all whom we walk with to do the same? I pray the answer is, 'yes'.

### **After Sermon Prayer**

Holy God, You would have us lean upon You as we walk with one another. But too often, like those who have gone before, our ears itch in such a way that we ignore or avoid those paths and traits that are of You. Help us to follow You on the way Lord by encouraging one even as we grow in our connection to one another through You. In Jesus' name we do pray. Amen.