

**Jeremiah 36:23 (LBT Bible Translation Sunday)**

**“Paper Shredders”**

**Sermon Written by Rev. Dr. R. Reed Lessing**

**September 26, 2021**

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The sermon for this Lutheran Bible Translators Bible Translation Sunday is written by the Rev. Dr. Reed Lessing. The text is Jeremiah 36:23: “As Jehudi read three or four columns, the king would cut them off with a knife and throw them into the fire in the fire pot, until the entire scroll was consumed in the fire that was in the fire pot.”

Paper shredders range in size and price from small and inexpensive units meant for a few pages, to large machines used by commercial shredding services that cost thousands of dollars. Regardless of size, make and model, we all probably know something about paper shredders.

Today we meet Mr. Paper Shredder himself—King Jehoiakim. “As Jehudi read three or four columns, king Jehoiakim would cut them off with a knife . . .” “J’s” are wild! **J**ehudi is in **J**udah of **J**erusalem in 604 BC reading the book of **J**eremiah while **J**ehoiakim shreds it with a knife!

Our paper shredders destroy bills, credit cards, bank statements and other sensitive documents. But Jehoiakim shreds God’s Word. Who in their right mind would cut up and shred God’s Word? Especially God’s Word in Jeremiah? It’s loaded with Gospel promises. Take a look.

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness’” (Jeremiah 23:5–

6 ESV). "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11 ESV). "I have loved you with an everlasting love" (Jeremiah 31:3 ESV). "Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy; I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow" (Jeremiah 31:13 ESV) "For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jeremiah 31:34 ESV).

What got into Jehoiakim that he shredded God's Word? You know. So do I. This is *the* work of the Paper Shredder. We don't know him by that name, though. Instead, we know him by the names of liar, deceiver, destroyer, devil, serpent, and Satan. Satan doesn't want us to have delight in God's Word; power in God's Word; hope in God's Word; life in God's Word; forgiveness in God's Word. That's why Satan shreds God's Word every chance he gets. Want some proof?

A recent George Barna survey of *Christians* found these stunning results: **58%** didn't know who preached the Sermon on the Mount. **52%** didn't know that the book of Jonah is in the Bible. **70%** didn't know that "God helps those who help themselves" is not in the Bible. **15%** agreed that the Gospels are Matthew, Mark, *Luther*, and John.

Question. Why does Satan shred God's Word? Answer. So he can shred our lives! Satan meets us in the morning and says, "This day is hopeless; go back to bed." He sees us in the bathroom and says, "You're ugly. How could anyone love you?" At the end of the day he says, "You're a sorry excuse for a Christian. God is finished with you!" Without God's Word to push back against these lies, Satan chews us up and spits us out.

That's Satan's strategy; keep people from God's Word. Here's Lutheran Bible Translator's strategy. *Get people into God's Word.* Here is the mission statement of Lutheran Bible Translators—"LBT makes God's Word accessible to those who do not yet have it in the language of their hearts."

Every day LBT launches a frontal attack against the Paper Shredder. And why is that? Over one-billion people worldwide don't have the full Bible in a language that touches them deeply—that is, the language of their hearts. An estimated 165 million don't have a single verse of Scripture translated into their language. The Paper Shredder has 165 million people with no Bible!

Martin Luther knew about the Paper Shredder. He writes in *A Mighty Fortress is our God*, "The old evil foe, now means deadly woe! Deep guile and great might are his dread arms in fight. On earth is not his equal." That's why Luther embraced God's Word—full throttle, especially in Romans. Romans 3:23–24, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." Romans 4:25, "He was delivered over to death for our sins and raised again for our justification." Romans 5:1, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Romans 5:20, "Where sin increased grace abounded all the more."

The old evil foe then enlisted *another* paper shredder to do his destructive work. In 1517, an Archbishop named Albert of Brandenburg set out to silence Luther. Albert was selling indulgences to pay off his debt to the pope. What are indulgences? The pope taught that indulgences—pieces of paper purchased by people and signed by the church—lessened

people's time in purgatory. Luther's Ninety-Five Theses taught that indulgences were bogus. Because people began believing Luther instead of the church, Albert was out big bucks! His response? Luther's writings about God's Word must be shredded!

Then in July, 1519, a debate took place in Leipzig, Germany. John Eck upheld Rome's position—that people are saved, in large part, by what they do. Luther still wouldn't budge on salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, for Christ's sake alone. After the debate, Pope Leo X excommunicated the Reformer. The excommunication began with these words from Psalm 80:13, "Arise, O Lord, a wild boar has invaded your vineyard." Who was the wild boar invading the church's vineyard? Martin Luther! Rome's response was that Luther must be silenced and shredded!

It all came to a head at an imperial assembly in Worms, Germany. On April 17, 1521, the Roman Catholic Church demanded that Luther recant. Luther asked for an evening to think about it. Then, on April 18, 1521, the Reformer announced, "My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant! Here I stand!" Luther took his cue from 1 Peter 1:25: "The word of the Lord endures forever." Rome responded. God's Word must be silenced, censored, and shredded.

Luther's courage, spine, and conviction came from the central teaching in God's Word—Christ crucified for sinners. Christ crucified means every one of God's Gospel promises in Jeremiah are now yours. Christ is your righteousness. Christ has plans to give you hope and a future. Christ loves you with an everlasting love. Because of Christ crucified, God changes our mourning into joy and our sorrow into gladness. And because of Christ crucified, God forgives our iniquity and remembers our sin no more.

That's because a Roman governor named Pontius Pilate gave Jesus over to professional shredders. They ripped and removed skin from the Savior's back, preparing him for the biggest, most industrial-grade shredder of the day. And what was that called? *Mors turpissima crucis*—that's Latin for what Rome called its shredder—"the utterly vile death on a cross." Jesus was shredded—crucified, dead, and buried. The end? I think not!

Jeremiah 36:32: "Then Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to Baruch who wrote on it at the dictation of Jeremiah all the words of the scroll that Jehoiakim king of Judah had shred and burned in the fire. And many similar words were added to them." Let me repeat the last line. "And many similar words were added to them!" Jeremiah says, "Mess with my sermon and the next time I'll add to it!" God resurrected Jeremiah's scroll—and then some!

Jeremiah's resurrected scroll was the prelude to another resurrected Scroll—and then some! Christ, the Word made flesh, rose again. What do we call that? Easter! Those who saw Christ alive were beside themselves. Mary cried out, "Rabboni!" The Emmaus disciples exclaimed, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road?" Then Thomas confessed, "My Lord and my God!"

Alive with the life of Jesus and the breath of the Holy Spirit—God's Holy Word is the living voice of the Gospel. For you, right now, it announces forgiveness for all your sin, showers you with grace, and rekindles resurrection hope. God's Word announces that weakness is power, loss is gain, and servanthood is greatness. And wherever God's Word is preached, studied, memorized, and read it is victorious over every satanic force that seeks to destroy its Holy Spirit power.

That's why Lutheran Bible Translators does more than produce Bibles. LBT's goal is production—to be sure. But production is not an end in itself. Bible production opens doors so there can be transformation—new life in Jesus.

You see, LBT works with pre-literate and semi-literate peoples. To produce a book is only the beginning because books aren't a part of these people's culture. LBT missionaries, therefore, establish long-term relationships. They gain trust. Learn the language. Embrace their culture. And learn to love individuals, families, and congregations, so people not only hear and read God's Word in their heart language, but so they also interact with Scripture so it goes down into their "insidest-inside"—deep within their minds and hearts. The result? Production leads to transformation!

And transformation leads to dedication. Luther again, "My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant. Here I stand!" The Reformer took his stand upon 1 Peter 1:25, "The word of the Lord endures forever." The Latin is, *Verbum Dei Manet In Aeternum*.

VDMA. Luther and his followers sewed VDMA on their coat sleeves and cloaks. Today we place VDMA deep in our hearts and minds. To all paper shredders we boldly confess, "*Verbum Dei Manet in Aeternum*. The word of the Lord endures forever. We will help translate, publish, and send this word to the ends of the earth. Here we stand!" Amen.

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