

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

We have a couple of challenging passages here in Scripture that I want to unpack a little bit. First of all, Jeremiah. Now, if you know anything about the prophet Jeremiah, Jeremiah had nothing good to say about anything. I mean, most prophets usually had some negative things to say because the Israelites rebelled against God on a pretty consistent basis and God consistently sent prophets to ask them or tell them repent and come back to the fold. Well, by the time Jeremiah got around, God about had enough, and this was when God said, "Okay, fine. You have failed and failed and failed to return to me. Now you're going to," as he said, "All the kingdoms of the north are going to come and they're going to set up their thrones right in Jerusalem." In other words, Jerusalem, you're going to lose and it's going to be bad. And in fact, this is right before Israel gets deported, in essence, to Babylon. They're in exile for 40 years.

Now, in those 40 years, they finally come back to Israel and once they get back, they stop chasing after other gods. It finally works, to some degree. They get it wrong in other degrees, which is what Jesus has to deal with when he comes around. But they finally started worshiping only God. Now, they started getting legalistic about how they should worship God so that was a problem. But in the meantime, Jeremiah had the wonderful opportunity of being the prophet who finally said, "God has had enough and it's going to happen now."

So you can imagine people's responses to Jeremiah, and they weren't exactly enthusiastic about seeing him show up. In fact, they threw him into prison all the way up to the exile and they said, "We're not going to let you out until you stop telling us these things." He never got out and the exile did happen. But one of the things that I thought was interesting as I was reading this, at the beginning of Jeremiah's ministry, he says, "I'm young. I'm kind of nervous about speaking your word." And God says, "Don't worry, I'm going to strengthen you. I'm going to give you my spirit. You're going to speak my words." And then he says, "I'm going to give you visions so you know what to say." And he says, "What do you see?" And he says, "I see an almond branch."

Why an almond branch? What does that have to... I mean, an olive branch I can understand, then peace, and we understand olive. Well, what in the world does an almond branch have to do with anything? So I had to do a little research, and what I discovered is this is a Hebrew play on words. The Hebrews don't do rhymes and things like we do where the end of the word sounds the same as the next word, but rather they take words that are similar in structure and they play around with them. Almond is very similar to the same word which watch and be ready. And so, when he says he sees an almond, the Lord then says, "You have seen well for I'm

watching over my word to perform it." So the almond, it's a play on Hebrew words. You have to go into the Hebrew to get it.

Just trust me that what they're trying to do is see Jeremiah is reassured that God is going to give him a message and he's going to give him the strength to give that message and that God is watching over him. That's what this whole almond branch play on words means. It's funny in Hebrew. I know it's not funny in English, but it works in Hebrew.

But anyway, God is watching over Jeremiah. Even though Jeremiah's message is one of destruction, is one of people being dismayed, destroyed, but God promises, "You must speak my words and I will be with you and I will strengthen you." Jeremiah didn't probably fully understand what in the world that meant, but he spoke the word of God because God promised it would make sense later on.

And then, we get to Jesus here and he's speaking in Galilee, in Capernaum, and he's rebuking demons and casting them out and they're saying, "What would you have to do with us, oh holy one of God? And he told them to be silent because they knew he was the Christ. Why would you tell somebody to be silent if they knew the truth? Isn't what Christ wanted was for the whole world to know that he was the Christ, the Son of the living God? Wasn't that the point of his ministry? Sort of. It was the point to know that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, but the Son of God for a purpose. Jeremiah spoke of judgment and destruction of the nation of Israel, but we know that the Messiah was promised through the other prophets and through Jeremiah that he would come to restore Israel, that he would come and be a king forever and sit on the throne of David forever. And there's a lot of Old Testament prophecies about him ruling and defeating the enemies.

And so, a lot of people didn't fully understand what the message was all about. Imagine you've got him controlling demons and casting them out. There's a phrase nowadays that says any publicity is good publicity, but that's not the case when it comes to demons. You really don't want demons bragging about how good you are. Kind of puts you into question as to why you're doing this whole thing. Even later on, we learned people accused Jesus of acting on behalf of Satan, that he casts out demons in the name of Beelzebub, the prince of lies. And so, Jesus wanted to make sure that it was clear what his message was and what his purpose was.

Now you think about this, the demons are saying, "He's the Son of God. He's the righteous one." And what do the people do? They want to hang onto him. They want to keep him there. They want to keep him doing miracles. And so, the miraculous nature of him casting out demons, what that did was it inclined a lot of people to focus on the temporal, the here and the now. They wanted to be healed of their physical diseases. They wanted to be healed of their ailments. They wanted the demons cast out. All those good things. They also wanted a king who would

wipe out those filthy Romans who would act as a mighty warrior and defeat the enemies here on earth and set up a temporal earthly kingdom. And in fact, that also happened several other times in Jesus' ministry. They tried to gather him and force him to be king because they misunderstood what the message was about. Jeremiah preached judgment because they failed to listen to the word of God. Jesus is preaching grace and mercy because also they failed to understand the word of God. See, the law only points us to the gospel. That's the point. And they weren't getting it. They were just looking for a temporary relief of their pain and sorrow. They were looking for a temporary relief of the problems of their kingdom. And Jesus was looking eternally. I mean, wouldn't it be great if we had peace in our land? If we had a ruler who provided peace throughout the world, well, that would be wonderful, but it would only be temporary. It would be about our little fiefdom right here, and it wouldn't deal with a major problem that all of humanity has, and that is sin. They were looking for a temporary ruler. They were looking for a miracle worker. They were excited that he was preaching with power and they were hoping that power would extend to military might.

But Jesus' power comes in his humility. Jesus' power comes in his death. And so, he told the demons to be silent because it wasn't about the temporal defeat of the demons or the temporal defeat of diseases. It was about the eternal defeat of sin, death, and the devil. And that only comes because Christ loves us, that the message of God is one of love. Now, Jeremiah spoke love as well, but he spoke the law in love. Repent is also a word of love when someone is wrong and when they are headed towards hell, the most loving thing you can do is tell them the need to repent and that they are forgiven of their sins. And sometimes it's not pleasant to be the voice in the wilderness saying God loves you, but he wants you to repent and turn away from your sin. That's not a popular message today.

Some Christian leaders and teachers are looking for authority and rule in this land, if we just had a Christian nation once more. It's not about the temporal world. It's about the eternal promise of salvation, and that's what Paul is trying to get us to understand. It doesn't matter. All these things, tongues and prophetic voices and wisdom and knowledge, all of these things are going to pass away because it's not about ultimately today. It's about today through eternity. And so, what is the main message? Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Now, if you replace the word love with God, it would mean the same thing.

This passage is often used for marriages and husband and wife, but really ultimately, this is about God. God is patient and kind. God does not envy or boast. He is not arrogant or rude. Well, he does insist upon his own way, but he doesn't make it forced. He wants us to come to him, but he doesn't insist upon it. He has given us free will. He desires a loving, open relationship, not one that is based

upon fear. Not one that is looking for power and might and control. Not one that is looking for political superiority, but one that is looking to serve one another. Love serves. God serves us, and he is patient and kind with us. And that is what the message that Christ was trying to communicate, which would have failed if he allowed the demons to continue to push, which would have failed if he allowed the humans to raise him up and be a temporal king, which would have failed if he had failed his temptation in the wilderness and worshiped Satan so that he could have mastery over all the kingdoms of this world. It wasn't about now. It was about now and all eternity. And that is accomplished through the love and the humility of Christ.

Is he God over all things? Yes. Does he have authority over all demons? Yes. Can he tell the storm to be still, the fever to be gone? Yes. And all of those things are impressive, but what is most impressive and most important is that he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on the cross, because his love was for you and for your salvation, your eternal life in Christ. May his love and his grace and his mercy and his peace be and abide with you always, now and forevermore unto life everlasting. Amen.