

Grace, mercy in peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. So, Jeremiah is getting an interesting response from his prophecy. Now, we've talked about Jeremiah multiple times in the past. He is the one unique prophet who actually gets to see the destruction that he prophesies. He's right there at the Babylonian captivity where Babylon is taking Israel or Judah away for 40 years, 70 years of captivity.

And Jeremiah is prophesying against the house of Jerusalem because Jerusalem, even though it is the house of the Lord, even though it is the place where God is to be worshipped, it is the place where God promised to be especially present with his people, his chosen people. This city and this state are currently in a peaceful situation. Their lives are good, their bank accounts are full, their bellies full, their lives are full. They're at peace. They've got good treaties. They've got a good army. The economic situation is wonderful. Everything is going smoothly. And so, they think that they're right with God. They praise God, but only by their words and not by their actual faith. There's a rot that is eating away at the nation. They no longer listen to the word of God. They no longer follow after God. They're more concerned about their bank account, their bellies, and their peace.

And so, Jeremiah says God is going to come. And why does God come to punish Israel at any time? It's not like Jeremiah was the first prophet to say that God was upset with a nation and God was upset with the practice of worship in Jerusalem. He definitely was not. But they've forgotten, or at least they choose not to remember. They'd rather condemn Jeremiah and the message than hear the truth about their faith. They'd rather just look like everybody else than recognize that they are called to be different.

And I think if we were here today, if Jeremiah were here today, he'd have much of the same things to say. We as a nation started out with a lot of us wanting to worship God and truth and purity. But what has happened to our nation? There's a rot that has infected us. There is evil that has infected this world, just like in Jeremiah's day, and what did Jeremiah say? "Mend it your ways and your deeds and obey the voice of the Lord, your God, and the Lord will relent of the disaster that he is pronounced against you." God didn't want to destroy Jerusalem. God doesn't want to condemn anybody to hell or damnation. His desire is to draw us to him. As it says in the Gospel, like a hen gathers her chicks to bring us into the safety of his promises.

But we as human beings refuse, walk away from him. Seek rather our own comfort. We're afraid to be ostracized. We're afraid to be persecuted. We're afraid to look different. And yet, what does Paul say? Paul says, "We should rejoice in our suffering." We should be joyful. Jeremiah suffers for his faith. We are called to

live a life of faith no matter what goes on in our lives. And suffering is part of that, because in suffering, we learn where our hope resides.

I was reading about modern day martyrs, people who die for their faith, and we have martyrs today in this world. We know of Syria right now is in the news killing Christians and others, but that's been going on since the beginning of Christianity. There is a theologian and a scholar who was studying and said that one out of every 200 Christians will be persecuted, and has been persecuted for all of history, that about one in 200 of Christians. So, we got a congregation. If we count our 8:00 service, 10:30 service Wednesday, we got about 200 people or so.

So, that being said, one of us could expect to be persecuted for our faith. Are you ready to be persecuted for your faith? Do you know what you would say or do if that would happen to you? You ought to be. It could happen. Now admittedly, here in America, it has not happened, and we're probably a few generations at least away from it actually happening if things continue down a negative path. But we do know other Christians today who are suffering for their faith, who are dying for their faith. And we too ought to be ready to die for our faith. Why? Because we know this. Our citizenship is of heaven, not of this world.

We are citizens of God's kingdom. That is our true residence, and we are just waiting to get home. This is why as Christians, we can gladly die, because we know when we die, we go home. We get to be with our God, our Savior and our Lord. But in the meantime, how do we live our lives today? And we ought to struggle with this and think about this. We are saved by grace through faith alone. God has saved us. He's given it to us as a gift. And as Jesus said, "Behold, I cast out demons, perform cures. Today, tomorrow, and the third day, I finish my course." Now I wonder what happened on the third day. Oh yeah, you should know this. Christ died on the cross and then he rose again on which day? The third day. He accomplished his mission. It was finished.

Because it is finished, we have nothing more that we need earn. It is a gift given to us, but because it is a gift, what do you do when you receive a gift? You say thank you, right? Thank you for this wonderful gift that you have given to me. Any birthday party, you have your kids say thank you to Aunt Mary and Uncle Joe for giving the gifts. You say thank you. It's the right thing to do.

How do we say thank you to God for this marvelous gift that he has given to us? Well, he calls us to bear witness to the love of God, to live our lives in such a way that people recognize that we are different. We should stick out in this world. We should look different and act different than the rest of the world. That's our calling. Regardless of whether people laugh at us or mock at us or anything like that, that is our calling because we know our focus is not on this world. Everybody else out

there, and unfortunately sometimes ourselves as well, are concerned with the things of this world, concerned to make sure our bellies are full, our bank accounts are full, and that we have a relaxing and peaceful life. We want to enjoy this life and we can enjoy this life, but not to the expense of our faith and not to the expense of our witness.

We're called not to focus upon the security that this world offers because it's a false security. It's a security that does not last and cannot carry us home. And so, this is why we can rejoice even when our possessions are taken away, even when we are hungry, even when our life is falling apart, even when there is war and rumor of war, because we know how it ends and we know the hope. And so, we cast our fears, our anxieties, and our worries upon God, and we strike out in boldness to rejoice in the Lord. Now, these 40 days of Lent, I've often talked about, the important thing not only is it to think about what am I going to give up for Lent. I mean, that's a good discipline to try and train ourselves to resist the temptations of this world. But what else are we going to do? How can we thank God for the gift that he has given to give up something as great, but to add something that gives glory to God is even better.

They will know we are Christians by our love, by our care for one another. We as Christians are called to live a different life so that God might use us as the means by which he gathers those lost chicks under his wing and bring them into his safety. Bring them into his love. Now, I don't want this to sound like you must do this in order to be saved. That's not what I'm saying. You are saved, like I said, by grace as a gift. But I want to encourage you to think, how can I thank God for this gift? How can I thank God for all these blessings that I have received?

How can I thank God by sharing his goodness with those around me so that they might know the comfort and peace that God offers? Because when he said the first day, today, tomorrow, and the third day, he finishes his course, it is finished. Our salvation has been won. We no longer need fear. He promises to protect us much more than a hand can protect our chicks, much more than an army can protect its nation, much more than anything. Our health can protect us from illness. He protects us with his divine mercy and love and grace. May that mercy, that grace, and that peace be and abide with you always, now and forever more unto life everlasting. Amen.