

Grace, mercy and peace be with you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Wow. Do we have some readings here? Jeremiah ends this with, "Isn't the word like fire declares the Lord and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces." Well, that sounds pleasant, doesn't it? And where is the gospel in Jesus? "I've come to bring division, not peace." Wait a second. What did the angels say when Jesus came and was born in the peace on earth, goodwill toward men. I thought that was the message. What is Jesus saying here? I did not come to bring peace but division. So we're going to sort all this stuff out and try and figure out what's going on with these messages.

So first off, Jeremiah, you got to understand Jeremiah's situation. Jeremiah is the last of the prophets before the Babylonian exile. He literally gets to experience the exile with everybody else, and he is proclaiming a word of repentance, like every other prophet who actually believed in God said before, repent for the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, for God's judgment is coming. And there were other prophets in the world and they said they had a message from God, but their message was, "Oh, don't listen to Jeremiah. Be in peace. Everything is well. All is good in the world. Don't worry. Relax, live your best life now."

The message was not one of repentance, it was do whatever you feel like doing because God is blessing us, obviously. I mean, and that was the philosophy of the day. Israel was in a time of prosperity. Everything was going well, the GDP was going up, wages were going up, comfort was going up. Everything was good except their spiritual life. That was a mess. Because they were worshiping almost everything except the one true God. Even when they did call upon the name of the Lord, they saw, they figured they could bargain and barter with God. Or they figured that as long as I'm wealthy, God must be pleased with whatever it is that I'm doing.

So they had wrong metrics to think about God. When they did think about God and the law of God, they thought, "Well, that's just things for me to do. And as long as I do those by my own definition to the extent that I'm able without looking too closely at how far I fall short of what God actually demands of me, then I'm okay." You see all the caveats and the protections that they put around their thoughts. They didn't want to listen to the hard stone-cold truth, that we are poor, miserable sinners.

And that's the truth, and that is the word of God. That is the message that Jeremiah was trying to convince the people to listen. That if you pay attention to the Ten Commandments, you actually read them and take them to heart. you will look at every single one of them and go, "Well, I failed that one. Oh, and that one. And that one and that one and that. Well, okay, I just failed them all. Didn't even come close. Did not even come close."

And I think about Jesus' statement when the guy said, "Well, what does the law say?" Do not commit murder on your father and mother and so on and so forth. I've done those since my youth. All right, sell all you have, give to the poor and come follow me. I think actually I worship my money more than I worship you. I'm going to keep my money because that's too much. Or when he says, "If you say you hate your brother, you've committed murder." Or if you lust in your heart, you've committed adultery. Well, that throws almost all of it out the window.

And ultimately, if you sin against one commandment, you've sinned against them all. Because every single commandment in essence is commentary on number one, you should have no other gods. And if you had no other gods, then you would do exactly what the Ten Commandments say to the fullest, to perfection. But since you don't, you have other gods that you worship, your own ideas, your own wealth, your own health and well-being, or whatever the case might be. Even if you're sitting in the church and you think that you're worshiping God, if you're still focused upon you, that's not going to be right. There are false prophets that are trying to tell us day in and day out, that we don't need to be worried about ourselves and worried about the things of this world. And the judgment is going to come because we are all miserable sinners. And have sinned against God and fought word and deed.

Now, I have to admit, that's not a pleasant message to hear, but it is God's word, and it would be awful if that was the only word of God. "You're a poor miserable sinner, sorry, you're out of luck." Try harder, do better. And if you don't, okay. No, but that's not the end of the message because the law condemns us. We know that everything we do, the very nature of ourselves is corrupted by sin. It's not just what we do. It's who we are. We are sinners who do sinful things. How can you change your nature? You can't. So you are stuck without somebody acting upon you.

And that was the part of the message that was missing. God does it all for us. As the book of Hebrews talks about, all these multiple different people by faith they did this, by faith they did that. By faith Abraham even sacrificed his own child, trusting that God would bring him back from the dead. By faith, Moses, by faith Isaac, Jacob, Solomon, David, everybody, the whole Old Testament.

Now it begins well, when it talks about they listen to the word of God and they were able to conquer kingdoms and force justice, obtain promises, stopping the mouths of lions, quenching the power of fire, escaping the edge of the sword. They were made strength out of weakness, became mighty and war and put foreign armies to flight. That all sounds good. That sounds great. However, some also suffered mocking and flogging and chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, sawn in two, they were killed with a sword. They went about in sheepskins, destitute, afflicted, mistreated. That part of it doesn't sound so good.

So it's wonderful, and we praise God when everything's going well, but when things aren't going well, well, God, we're going to ignore your word and we're going to do what we want. No, the good with the bad in this world is all God's gift to us. And when we don't understand that, we fail to understand the message. See, we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, people who lived their entire lives in the hope of the coming of the Christ, the Messiah, and never saw it, but they still died in faith.

Some were martyred, some lived to a ripe old age, but there's no guarantee one way or the other, they died in faith. Because they trusted the word of God. Because the word of God is like fire. It can either cleanse us or it can destroy us. It's like a hammer. It can protect us or it can break us to pieces. How it affects you, how it works upon you is faith or not faith. Do you believe the word of God? Do you believe that God can do what he promises to do? And if you do, then it's a cleansing fire. If you don't, then it's a destroying and consuming fire.

It's all about God and his word, and we believe it because he is the founder and perfecter of our faith. Notice there's nothing about us doing anything there. He's the founder, he's the perfecter. He's the one that does it all and gives it to us as a gift. Why? Because of the baptism that he faced, the anointing that he had to go to the cross, to bear the sins of all of humanity, to pay the debt that we owed. This is why I see some of you, and sometimes I do it myself when I start out, I poor miserable sinner, I actually smile. Why? Because I know what comes next. I know that I am a miserable sinner, but for the sake of Christ, I'm free. I am forgiven. I have hope.

Now, this world may bring about disaster and challenges that I do not want to face. Heartache and pain and suffering, which is of course what Christ himself suffered. But he suffered it all for the joy. The joy? The joy of what? The joy of bringing us into his family. The joy of forgiving us our sins, the joy of bringing all of us to the promised land where we might live at peace, where he gets the opportunity to wipe our tears away. That is the joy that he had. So much so that the suffering of humanity, seriously, the guilt of all of humanity, he suffered the pain that was deserved for us because of the joy of bringing us into his family.

That's how much he loves us. That's how much he desires. And that is the peace that he brings. But that peace is not of the world. It's in the world, but it's not of the world. The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding. The angels' declaration peace on earth and goodwill toward men, it is only based upon faith in the word that became flesh.

And unfortunately, if you do not believe that word became flesh, it will divide. It will rip families apart. It will rip societies apart unfortunately. Not because God desires it, but because people refuse to listen, because they don't want to be told

that they are sinners. They don't want to hear the fact that they've fallen short. What they want is all is good. Be at peace. Don't worry, it's all good.

But we know better. We know that we need to cling to God's word. We need to be baptized into that word. We need to be cleansed by that word of our sin, of our apathy, of our self-centeredness. We need to be cleansed by God's word of all of that so that we might live in hope, so that we might not grow weary or be faint-hearted. Not that we have the strength, but the word of God gives us the strength.

So hold fast to that word. Live in the promises, confident that your sins have been forgiven in Christ. So that that fire and that hammer do not destroy you, but rather purify you and protect you because his word endures forever. And whatever may come, the good and the bad, the easy and the hard, the praise and the mocking, we can endure it all. Because this world, these afflictions, these challenges are temporary compared to the eternity that we will have with God, this is a blink of an eye.

This is a moment in time compared to the everlasting joy and salvation that comes through Christ. Hold fast to his word. Keep your eyes on his word. Listen to his word, even when it condemns, so that you might be strengthened for this path of life, and you might be brought home to live with him for all eternity. Trust his word. He is faithful. He is just. He has forgiven. He will continue to guide. He will continue to direct. Do not be afraid. He's with you always to the very end of the age.

May his grace and his mercy and his peace be and abide with you always now and forevermore unto life everlasting. Amen.