

07.12.26 ~ Pentecost 7
“Transforming Grace”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Words of Prophecy

Jeremiah 2:4-13 ^{TLB}

Pew Bible 647

⁴⁻⁵ O Israel, says the Lord, why did your fathers desert me? What sin did they find in me that turned them away and changed them into fools who worship idols? ⁶ They ignore the fact that it was I, the Lord, who brought them safely out of Egypt and led them through the barren wilderness, a land of deserts and rocks, of drought and death, where no one lives or even travels. ⁷ And I brought them into a fruitful land, to eat of its bounty and goodness, but they made it into a land of sin and corruption and turned my inheritance into an evil thing. ⁸ Even their priests cared nothing for the Lord, and their judges ignored me; their rulers turned against me, and their prophets worshiped Baal and wasted their time on nonsense.

⁹ But I will not give you up—I will plead for you to return to me and will keep on pleading; yes, even with your children’s children in the years to come!

¹⁰⁻¹¹ Look around you and see if you can find another nation anywhere that has traded in its old gods for new ones—even though their gods are nothing. Send to the west to the island of Cyprus; send to the east to the deserts of Kedar. See if anyone there has ever heard so strange a thing as this. And yet my people have given up their glorious God for silly idols! ¹² The heavens are shocked at such a thing and shrink back in horror and dismay. ¹³ For my people have done two evil things: They have forsaken me, the Fountain of living waters; and they have built for themselves broken cisterns that can’t hold water!

Leader: These Are God’s Words of Warning.

People: Thanks be to God!

Words of Instruction

Romans 6:1-14 ^{NLT}

Pew Bible 981

Sin’s Power Is Broken

¹ Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace? ² Of course not! Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it? ³ Or have you forgotten that when we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined him in his death? ⁴ For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives.

⁵ Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised to life as he was. ⁶ We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin. ⁷ For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin. ⁸ And since we died with Christ, we know we will also live with him. ⁹ We are sure of this because Christ was raised from the dead, and he will never die again. Death no longer has any power over him. ¹⁰ When he died, he died once to break the power of sin. But now that he lives,

he lives for the glory of God. ¹¹ So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus.

¹² Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to sinful desires. ¹³ Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to serve sin. Instead, give yourselves completely to God, for you were dead, but now you have new life. So use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God. ¹⁴ Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God's grace.

Leader: These Are Apostle Paul's Words.

People: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Transforming God, we worship you today with gratitude that we can. We thank you for a legacy of freedom and religious liberty. We confront our sin, knowing that we have fallen short, but ask your forgiveness again and again if needed. Jesus paid the ultimate price for our redemption, and for that we are eternally grateful. Be with us now as we hear prophetic warnings and Paul's instructions to help us acknowledge our human weaknesses. Keep us humble enough to seek your grace and faithful as Christ taught. Please speak through these Scriptures, this message, and messenger. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

As you heard and will discover through mid-August, we'll be back in Jeremiah, the prophet, for our Old Testament Scriptures. I have only preached on a few mid-to-later chapters of Jeremiah so far but decided his first six chapters provide a strong parallel of cultural sin to Paul's experiences living with Gaius in Corinth, Greece as he writes to the Romans. The first chapter was Jeremiah's calling to speak on behalf of the Lord, and it is likely that this chapter 2 was Jeremiah's first sermon after his ordination. Let's get some background first.

After the death of King Solomon around 930 BC, the United Kingdom of Israel split into northern and southern tribes. Ten northern tribes became Israel in the north with its capital Samaria; the southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin became the southern kingdom of Judah, with its capital Jerusalem and they stayed loyal to David. For our

purposes, it is helpful to know that Jeremiah's written prophecies have no chronological consistency, yet all were given to him in times of stress, upheaval, and great need. Chapters 1 through 6 represent the time of King Josiah, the fifteenth king of Judah, roughly between 627 and 605 BCE. Our brief six-chapter study of Jeremiah will correspond to the thirteenth year of King Josiah's reign and occurred before the Babylonian exile. King Josiah began his reign at 8 years of age, ruling for thirty-one (31) years so he provided some stability. Jeremiah chapters 2-25 were prophecies of judgment on the nation of Judah, especially its people who rejected God for idolatry instead.

The first message from God confronted Jerusalem's waywardness. Jeremiah spoke against the priests, leaders, and prophets who worshipped Baal, not Yahweh, as their north star. There is a slight reference to being judged as one would be in a court case ("claims," "charges"), but it is used only as symbolic metaphor. Israel, as a whole, had committed two sins: they had forsaken God and had replaced God with false idols. In his recollection of the exodus, Israel's wandering in the Egyptian desert for forty years, forsaking God's commands, turning his love into transgression, and eventually finding themselves in the promised land of milk and honey in Canaan, Jeremiah reminds them of both their sin and their love of God.

The other symbol used in our passage is the cistern. Israel was known for its fresh natural springs, the best source of water, but since it was desert land, cisterns were large pits dug into the rock and covered with plaster to make them watertight. The water, however, could turn brackish and not drinkable if there was not enough rain. Many were

broken or cracked over the years, so Jeremiah compared their worship choices to a leaky, nasty, broken cistern, unable to hold fresh water or was full of unpotable water. Using those metaphors, where does our culture stand today? I've heard many conversations reflecting on the past glory days of how church "used to be" but we are living in a changing world, where there are as many options for Christian church or church practices as there are nationalities. The good news that Paul shares with the Roman citizens is that we have the hope of Jesus Christ, whose sacrifice transforms our sin into forgiveness and holy redemption.

In last week's Romans chapter 5, the apostle Paul introduced the concepts of justification, reconciliation, and being freed from sin due to God's forgiving grace and mercy. We focused on the perseverance and endurance both required and given to achieve that through belief in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. I hope you are reading the full chapters each week to gain more context and study right along with our sermon short summaries. Romans is both rich and complicated. Today in Chapter 6, Paul is defending some of his critics who believed that if one was always saved because of Jesus' death on the cross, one could continue to have fun committing sin after sin yet still be forgiven. By no means, he says! Union with Christ means freedom from sin! True, temptation still exists, but we are to offer ourselves fully (heart, body, mind, and soul) to God, for his leadership and direction away from sin, toward holiness.

It is in this chapter Paul deals with the practical issues of sin. Some followers are trying to do both, follow Jesus and follow the law, but the Levitical rules of law were no longer needed. And as his hearers and

readers wrestle with their own cultural desires for pleasure and greed, he calls them out to confront temptation:

¹¹ So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus. ¹² Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to sinful desires. ¹³ Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to serve sin. Instead, give yourselves completely to God, for you were dead, but now you have new life. So use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God. ¹⁴ Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God's grace (Romans 6:11-14).

Paul is explaining in this chapter that Christians have spiritually died to sin, an identity symbolized by baptism. Believers are united with Christ in His death and resurrection when we receive Christ, and that will change us, not immediately, but through a consistent and humbling transformation. Believers are no longer enslaved to sin; we are transformed by grace to serve only God and to share our faith with others. Sin is no longer a master; grace becomes our master through the work of the Holy Spirit to sanctify our lives. That means making some changes, and for our group here, you may have made those character changes years ago. However, I would argue that although sin and evil are no longer your masters, they are still existent in our culture and earthly lives today threatening our behaviors and faith. We believers must still be strong in our prayer lives, our Bible Studies, Godly relationships, consistent worship, and spiritual practices to build healthy Christian boundaries against temptations of sin. Yes, we have received grace, but have we been transformed? And, as temptations present themselves, are we transforming and sanctified to resist them? That is something only you can answer. What happened to the people of Judah is happening today

with multiple gods, religions, no worship, selfish greed, or interest in the occult. Will we hear Jeremiah's warnings from God? Will we abandon our love of Yahweh for the more popular spiritualist or humanist philosophies? What about the last generations? And the ones to come?

Next week, we'll learn about what it means to be freed to live righteous lives and be an example to others. If you want to learn specifics of how to apply this transforming grace, read the rest of Romans, chapter 6; we're continuing the discussion in 6:15-23 next Sunday. Amen?

Amen! ||

Please pray with me: We thank you Lord for the guidance you give us in your Scriptures. Help us to trust and obey your instruction and live out our faith with good character. Remind us when we slip that we are transformed by your grace; help us to stay the course and surrender to your will. Please forgive us when we sin. Accept our gratitude and strengthen our resolve to follow your teachings, inviting others to love you as we do. We pray these things in Jesus' name, Amen.