

07.19.26 ~ Pentecost 8

“Righteous Living”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Words of Prophecy

Jeremiah 3:6-15 ^{TLB}

Pew Bible 649

⁶ This message from the Lord came to me during the reign of King Josiah: Have you seen what Israel does? Like a wanton wife who gives herself to other men at every chance, so Israel has worshiped other gods on every hill, beneath every shady tree. ⁷ I thought that someday she would return to me and once again be mine; but she didn't come back. And her faithless sister Judah saw the continued rebellion of Israel. ⁸ Yet she paid no attention, even though she saw that I divorced faithless Israel. But now Judah too has left me and given herself to prostitution, for she has gone to other gods to worship them. ⁹ She treated it all so lightly—to her it was nothing at all that she should worship idols made of wood and stone. And so the land was greatly polluted and defiled. ¹⁰ Then, afterwards, this faithless one “returned” to me, but her “sorrow” was only faked, the Lord God says. ¹¹ In fact, faithless Israel is less guilty than treacherous Judah!

¹² Therefore, go and say to Israel, O Israel, my sinful people, come home to me again, for I am merciful; I will not be forever angry with you. ¹³ Only acknowledge your guilt; admit that you rebelled against the Lord your God and committed adultery against him by worshiping idols under every tree; confess that you refused to follow me. ¹⁴ O sinful children, come home, for I am your Master, and I will bring you again to the land of Israel—one from here and two from there, wherever you are scattered. ¹⁵ And I will give you leaders after my own heart, who will guide you with wisdom and understanding.

Leader: These Are God's Words of Reconciliation.

People: Thanks be to God!

Words of Instruction

Romans 6:15-23 ^{NLT}

Pew Bible 981

Sin's Power Is Broken

¹⁵ Well then, since God's grace has set us free from the law, does that mean we can go on sinning? Of course not! ¹⁶ Don't you realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey? You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God, which leads to righteous living. ¹⁷ Thank God! Once you were slaves of sin, but now you wholeheartedly obey this teaching we have given you. ¹⁸ Now you are free from your slavery to sin, and you have become slaves to righteous living. ¹⁹ Because of the weakness of your human nature, I am using the illustration of slavery to help you understand all this. Previously, you let yourselves be slaves to impurity and lawlessness, which led ever deeper into sin. Now you must give yourselves to be slaves to righteous living so that you will become holy. ²⁰ When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the obligation to do right. ²¹ And what was the result? You are now ashamed of the things you used to do, things that end in eternal doom. ²² But now you are free from the power of sin

and have become slaves of God. Now you do those things that lead to holiness and result in eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Leader: These Are Apostle Paul's Words.

People: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

O God of forgiveness and freedom, we worship you today with gratitude for comfort, surrounded by our friends in fellowship, and in the joy of your abiding presence. We thank you for the religious liberty and Baptist distinctives we have celebrated this month. In these passages, we confront our sin and accept the invitation to relationship and reconciliation through your mercy, grace, and forgiveness. Jesus, our Lord and Savior, paid the ultimate price and for his sacrifice, we thank you. Be with us now as we listen to Jeremiah's messages and Paul's instructions to continue our journey out of sin. Keep us humble, disciplined, and faithful as we strive to live righteously through you. Speak through this message and messenger. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

We had a bit of Bible history last week, so you might recall that the prophecies in Isaiah are about Israel, the Northern Kingdom, and Jeremiah's prophecies are about Judah, the Southern Kingdom. Both kingdoms had rejected Yahweh for other gods and idols. Specifically, Chapters 1-6 of Jeremiah take place during King Josiah's reforms, between 627 and 605 BCE just before the Babylonian exile begins.

Jeremiah's first message in Chapter 2, his ordination sermon, was about Israel's spiritual harlotry—how they worshipped other gods than Yahweh and how God confronted them about that sin. This behavior is often called “apostasy,” an intentional, willing rejection of God, Jesus, or the Christian faith (including Bible teachings) by someone or a group who previously believed. Both prophets called out Israel's and Judah's sinful actions. Jeremiah illustrated the Northern Kingdom's apostasy as a faithless woman twice divorced because of adultery, and Judah, the Southern Kingdom, although warned of this great sin, chose to be a

spiritual adulterer by worshipping pagan gods instead of Yahweh. God, through Jeremiah, called Judah the faithless and adulterous sister who worshipped stone and wood, pretending to love God, but being immoral, fickle, and disloyal. In our passage today, God called Judah to repent from this symbolic, spiritual adultery of idol worship, especially of the popular fertility gods, since the people had not learned to remain faithful from Israel's mistakes.

God further promised to gather a remnant of the forgiven people with kind and gentle shepherds who would lead them to a thriving existence. God invites them to return, repent, and rebuild their covenantal relationship, first, through restorative reconciliation and second, through the shepherd leaders who would unconditionally provide and care for their needs. The spiritual adultery kept them captive to sin like slaves are held captive to prevent them from running away to freedom. See the symbolic chains on our front bulletin cover. The idolatry is bad enough, but temple customs generated even more sinful behaviors: deviant sex for payment, desecration of their bodies, other repulsive abominations, and the worst sin one can imagine were all holding them captive. Today's list might be drugs, alcohol, sex, theft, greed, incest, murder, violence, and more.

Sin prevents righteous living and good moral judgment; it clouds our decision-making process. Ask any addict whose physical need outweighs decisive healing. Asking Christ to transform your heart is the best way to get off the merry-go-round of sin and destruction even though it is just the first step. Righteous living as we will hear more about in Romans 6 requires more than human decision or willpower. It starts with

surrender to God's will, asking Jesus to come into one's heart (for the first time or the millionth time); and then the blessings will begin to appear as the human will or ego sheds its arrogant self and begins the process of healing and eventual sanctification.

Last week, Paul told us or reminded his readers and hearers they were no longer under the law and that sin would no longer be their master nor they be slaves to sin. This week is both theological and practical. His critics questioned again if grace is so powerful, why can't they go on having fun sinning and be forgiven later? No way! Their logic makes sense, but God's ways are not our ways, and our commitment to him must be trustworthy, not manipulative. Paul reminds them that sin leads to death, period. Obedience to God's will leads to a life of righteousness. And as we defined righteousness in earlier weeks, that means "right relationship" with God and specifically Jesus Christ the Messiah!

This obedience is different than Paul's upbringing; we are not speaking of obedience to the laws of the land, either civil or temple laws. He is speaking of obeying the laws of Christ's teachings and following his example. Having been baptized in Christ, these believer/readers have made a commitment, but like those in Judah, they are backing out of it and choosing to live according to the culture and civic laws rather than the commandments of God's divine Son, Jesus. Notice how I changed the word from law to commandment there? The apostle Paul pleads with them to renew their right relationship with Christ so that he, through the power of the Holy Spirit, can transform their behaviors from sin to virtue. In our case, if we do the same, Jesus will become your priority and north star for direction, discernment, and choices in daily living.

Paul is sometimes misunderstood to have meant any and all commandments of God in this letter to the Romans, but that is not true. Paul only means that the Jewish law, especially the ceremonial requirements of the Jewish law, has no power over their (or our) living righteously. Here we are not dictating “propriety” or telling people how exactly to live, rather, we are encouraging a right relationship with the triune God. As Baptists, we may interpret that lifestyle differently, yet having been baptized in Christ, we do agree that sin belongs to the old life, but now, you belong to righteousness and are beyond the powers of sin (vs. 17-18). This is your new life, new commitment, in keeping with our words of communion in Luke 22:20: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."

Paul uses the concept of slavery to interpret our reactions to sin. Freedom from sin is freedom from the law. If grace transforms us into servants or **slaves to God**, then we are sanctified and have eternal life through him. The slavery language may not make as much sense to us as it did to his hearers and readers. Try this instead. A slave’s former owner has no control over him or her; only the new owner has new rules and requires new behaviors. So, try substituting the word “obsessed” or “committed” over being a slave to something. This defines a willing choice and a freedom to choose how we are to live in a right relationship with Jesus, thus becoming righteous.

So, as I said last week, we believers must be strongly connected to God in all we do, but especially in our prayer lives, our Bible Studies, relationships, consistent worship, and spiritual practices in order to live healthy Christian lives and resist sin. Yes, we have received grace, but

have we been transformed? As temptations present themselves, are we humble enough to change or reject them? What happened to the people of Judah is happening today with multiple gods, religions, no worship, selfish greed, gambling, sex trafficking, or interest in the occult. Will we hear Jeremiah's warnings from God? Will we follow Paul's instructions?

Next week, we'll learn about what it means to be truly set free. You may wish to read on ahead in Chapter 7. Amen? Amen! ||

Please pray with me: 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 and choices. Remind us when we slip that we are transformed by your grace and can live lives of righteousness if we stay in your presence. 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.