

08.09.26 ~ Pentecost 11
“Struggles and Judgment-Part 2”
The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Words of Prophecy

Jeremiah 4:1-4, 11-14, 20-22a ^{NKJV}

Pew Bible 650, 651

Jeremiah Laments over Judah

¹ “If you will return, O Israel,” says the Lord,

“Return to Me;

And if you will put away your abominations out of My sight,
Then you shall not be moved.

² And you shall swear, ‘The Lord lives,’

In truth, in judgment, and in righteousness;

The nations shall bless themselves in Him,

And in Him they shall glory.”

³ For thus says the Lord to the men of Judah and Jerusalem:

“Break up your fallow ground,

And do not sow among thorns.

⁴ Circumcise yourselves to the Lord,

And take away the foreskins of your hearts,

You men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem,

Lest My fury come forth like fire,

And burn so that no one can quench *it*,

Because of the evil of your doings.”

¹¹ At that time it will be said

To this people and to Jerusalem,

“A dry wind of the desolate heights *blows* in the wilderness

Toward the daughter of My people—

Not to fan or to cleanse—

¹² A wind too strong for these will come for Me;

Now I will also speak judgment against them.”

¹³ “Behold, he shall come up like clouds,

And his chariots like a whirlwind.

His horses are swifter than eagles.

Woe to us, for we are plundered!”

¹⁴ O Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness,

That you may be saved.

How long shall your evil thoughts lodge within you?

²⁰ Destruction upon destruction is cried,

For the whole land is plundered.

Suddenly my tents are plundered,

And my curtains in a moment.

²¹ How long will I see the standard,
And hear the sound of the trumpet?

²² “For My people *are* foolish,
 They have not known Me.
 They *are* silly children,
 And they have no understanding.
 They *are* wise to do evil,
 But to do good they have no knowledge.”

Leader: These Are God’s Words of Warning.

People: Thanks be to God!

Words of Instruction

Romans 7:7-10, 14-20, 25 ^{NRSVUE}

Pew Bible 982

The Law and Sin

⁷ What then are we to say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.” ⁸ But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law sin lies dead. ⁹ I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived ¹⁰ and I died, and the very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me.

The Inner Conflict

¹⁴ For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin. ¹⁵ I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶ Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ But in fact it is no longer I who do it but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸ For I know that the good does not dwell within me, that is, in my flesh. For the desire to do the good lies close at hand, but not the ability. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it but sin that dwells within me.

²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So then, with my mind I am enslaved to the law of God, but with my flesh I am enslaved to the law of sin.

Leader: These Are Apostle Paul’s Words.

People: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

God of all, we thank you for all we have even though we sometimes struggle. We are grateful to be together to worship you and ask you to open our minds and hearts to hear this hard message today. We love your son Jesus and thank you for sending him to teach us and go to the cross on our behalf. We come in confession to surrender our burdens, worries, grief, and sin to you and the Holy Spirit for healing, redemption, and renewal. We ask forgiveness and mercy, knowing that you alone provide undeserved grace. Let us listen closely to your servants Jeremiah and Paul. Speak through this message and messenger. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

Well, here we are again, and I'm grateful but I must tell you a little disappointed. Friday, I thought we'd found a solution, but yesterday realized the compressors died again. So please keep praying for our Mission Center partners, church, pastor, and team. I hope since last week you have been thinking about these two passages and your own lives; what sin, if any, did you choose to confess to God last week? Did you feel or perceive his forgiveness? I hope so. Most of us move along with our days and weeks and yearly calendars so fast or we only pray for others' needs that we don't take the quiet time necessary to deepen our reliance and relationship with God. I hope that even in the midst of whatever crisis hits, you'll try to make that time at least once a week if not daily to both study the Scriptures and to pray with repentance in mind. It will build a healthier spiritual you as I speak from experience.

If you'll recall two weeks ago, Jeremiah tried to get Judah, the Southern Kingdom, to give up her idolatrous worship and sinful ways of living. They said they would, but they didn't, so this chapter's early verses implore the people to be sincere in their repentance. For Jeremiah, repentance requires both confession of guilt and acknowledging Yahweh as their one and only Lord. Repentance demands humility and a surrendered heart, two things we self-reliant humans do not practice well. How many self-help aisles are at your bookstore? Or life hacks in your social media reels? We egocentric humans would rather "pull ourselves up by our bootstraps" than to fall on our knees in brokenness and submission. Yet that is what God is calling these people in Jeremiah and us to do. We are to die to self and oh how we hate those words! Surrender

to the cross. Yes, we like to sing the words or join the penitent crowd in an evangelical event, but is this something we can live out daily? God offers grace and mercy to the repentant sinner and here in Jeremiah God is offering them a second chance to get rid of the “detestable idols.”

His first metaphor was plowing a field; we must break up the hard soil in order to fertilize it and plant seed. Seeds may sprout but roots of the plant or tree won't grow in brick hard soil. He implies their hearts are so hard from the years of idolatry turning away from Yahweh that they will need to confess first and do the internal work before his love can be perceived. Although it may sound, upon your first reading, that God is withholding his grace unless they do these things, be assured that his love and mercy are not conditional. After two weeks of pondering the passages, my own growth within times of struggle, and God's limitless grace, I see and know for certain that his instruction is about our perception of God's grace and love. We cannot even imagine or perceive a cleansing forgiveness until we are humbly broken before the throne. And what that looks like for you is entirely personal; it must be an ongoing intimate conversation with God, not a one time, baptismal, mountain-top moment only. Sometimes, those pivotal moments are what we remember, and they are valid and important, but a daily conversation with God is required for you to actually feel forgiven so much so that you are compelled to share your faith with others. If that is something foreign to you, then we need to talk. It does not matter that you are here each Sunday! How is your relationship with your creator, God, with Jesus? Does the Holy Spirit rule your life or do you?

The second metaphor Jeremiah used was circumcision. Though physically circumcised, they needed to circumcise their hearts. Repentance is not just an outward appearance of living a good life or having good character. The desert winds from verses 11-14 destroy and bring storms of swirling destruction. He warns these people with his image representing evil in their lives and hearts; they must repent or not be saved. Judgment will come in the storms; these foolish people have a second chance. Will they take it?

And of course, we hear that from the apostle Paul's letter to the Romans about Jesus! Paul's definition of repentance is more about transformation than the act Jeremiah describes; Paul's war within is between the law and surrender to Christ. He had his whole career of following the law and it made him successful, yet he was a broken man when he finally realized it encountering Jesus. His perception of God changed; his hardened heart was softened to receive the unmerited forgiveness of Christ's sacrifice on the cross and resurrection. The brick soil of his mind and heart had been plowed under and over to make room for Jesus' teachings and love. What we hear in these passages today is the apostle Paul's frustration brought on by transformation. Change is not easy! Paul had to shed his former upbringing, literally putting it into the past so he could be adopted into the family of believers. Most of us like this passage because it allows us to see this hero of faith more like us, flawed, doubting, yet also believing in Jesus.

As Paul tries to explain his theological view along with his personal confession, he admits that he never has been a perfect specimen. His sin is part of his very being, a part of what the Creator built into him. His

mind may obey the laws, but his flesh cannot, despite all his efforts. The Greek word for “flesh” is *sarx* and Paul sees this as his human nature independent of God’s grace. Now if that is true, then how could God transform a person made of flesh? That is one of his deeper questions in Romans. I do not have the answer because transformation, repentance, *metanoia* are all words that require supernatural intervention! Again, no striving or self-help books will get you there! But the good news is just asking the same difficult questions Paul asks, “why do I do what I do not wish to do, and not do what I want to do for God” may bring frustration, but it is the right question to allow God to help you accept the human flaws we have and surrender to his will and direction. Human willpower is marketed yet it is the enemy. The sin of desire, will, force, or whatever your evil is, is inside of us. We must strive to follow Jesus, true. That is a worthy endeavor, but surrendering to Christ’s love and forgiveness will bring more healing and transformation than anything we have power to do. Surrender to God is the key. What will you give up in your struggles to allow judgment to be grace not punishment? Keep praying, keep asking, keep studying, keep serving, and keep coming back to worship. Amen. ||

Please pray with me: Thank you Lord for the guidance you give us. May we never forget that you are our strength and deliverer. Help us to obey you first through surrender and trust. Transform our hearts and minds, Lord, to be centered on you rather than on our self-help to-do list. Remind us that you took mercy on us and we celebrate undeserved grace. Let us not fear judgment, but welcome and accept your forgiveness. We pray these things in Jesus’ name, Amen.