

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Pentecost 6 – July 17th and 20th, 2014

Jeremiah 28:5-9 (NIV – 1984)

Then the prophet Jeremiah replied to the prophet Hananiah before the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the LORD. He said, "Amen! May the LORD do so! May the LORD fulfill the words you have prophesied by bringing the articles of the LORD's house and all the exiles back to this place from Babylon. Nevertheless, listen to what I have to say in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people: From early times the prophets who preceded you and me have prophesied war, disaster and plague against many countries and great kingdoms. But the prophet who prophesies peace will be recognized as one truly sent by the LORD only if his prediction comes true.

Dear children of our Heavenly Father

Lately there has been a lot of things related to the Bible in the news. There have been Supreme Court rulings about how Christian businesses can act on things pertaining to their faith. There have been lots of state courts – Wisconsin being one of those - that have been ruling on same sex marriage. With all of these things, people will ask me Pastor what are your thoughts on these subjects? I often times answer these types of questions with a similar answer. I ask them what God's Word has to say, because God's Word is the only truth in all of these matters. Some people will accept this type of answer and trust that God's Word is the truth. Others might not believe all of the Bible or even some of the Bible and then the discussion gets a little more involved. They might ask, how do you know that your teachings are right -- maybe you are wrong in some of your teachings. The truth is, we live in a world that does not always hold to the whole truth of God's Word and that can sometimes be difficult. How are we to handle questions like this?

It is this dilemma that will guide us this morning. What are we to say when we are challenged for our faith or people speak things that contradict God's Word? What are we to say when we are asked the questions, "How do you know that your religious position is the right one?" When people asked that question in the past, they meant, "How do you know your Christian denomination is the one that has all its teachings right?" When people ask that question today, they many times mean, "How do you know that Christianity is the only right religion?" Today's society says that it is the height of arrogance to say that your faith is the right one or the only path to heaven; it is intolerable to suggest that your religious and moral views are completely correct. Yet it is the height of human arrogance to ignore God's clear testimony about himself that he has given us in his creation, in our conscience, and most clearly in the Scriptures. Even though we have God's clear message to us, there are still so many religious messages floating around in the world. There are so many Christian and non-Christian religious ideas that it begs the question, "Whom should I listen to?" With all of the theological ideas that are tossed around, how can I find the one that reveals God's will? Whom should I listen to?

Theme: Whom Should I Listen To?

- 1. The lies of this world**
- 2. The truth of God's Word**

The length of this sermon doesn't permit us to fully answer every aspect of those questions. Today we will limit our discussion of those questions and answers to the thoughts in our First Lesson for today, from Jeremiah 28:5-9. But before we answer those questions from a biblical perspective, think about how you answer similar questions in your daily life. Let's say you have an appointment with the dentist. The dental staff takes x-rays and does the examination, and then they give you the news. It's not good. You've got some cavities. You need to floss frequently and regularly, and you need to use a prescription mouthwash to reduce

gingivitis and to prevent further problems. Will you listen to the dentist's advice, even though a part of you would like to believe that the problem will just disappear on its own? I suppose you could get a second opinion. You could go down to another dentist and have someone tell you, "It's okay. You're teeth look fine. Don't worry about them at all. And for goodness sake, don't floss!" Whom should you listen to? Probably not the person who only tells you what you want to hear. You should probably listen to the person who tells you what you need to hear.

Take another example. You're driving your car when you start to hear some strange noises coming from the hood. You take it to the dealership, and after inspecting it, the mechanic tells you what the problem is, as well as the \$800.00 price tag that will pay for the repair. I suppose you could go to another dealer to get a second opinion. I suppose you could keep going to different mechanics until you got the analysis that you wanted to hear. So whom should you listen to? Probably not the mechanic who tells you only what you want to hear – unless you want to get stuck on the highway an hour from home because your car broke down! You should probably listen to the mechanic that tells you what you need to hear.

You're driving down the road of life when you are confronted with all sorts of options. One option is to hear and listen to all of God's Word and will of God. The other is to ignore it and do whatever pleases you most for the moment. One voice tells you that God was serious when he said that he wants sex to be enjoyed as a *marriage* blessing. The other voice tells you, "Hey, what's the big deal? Everybody's doing it! A little pre-marital sex here, a little lust there, a little breaking of God's commands will never hurt anyone, right?" One voice tells you that God was serious when he said that he employees should work faithfully and honestly for their bosses. The other voice tells you, "Hey, what's the big deal? Is anyone really going to notice it if you drag your feet a little and take it easy?" One voice tells you that God was serious when he said that a major component of the church's mission is to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth. The other voice tells you, "Hey, what's the big deal? Would a loving God *really* send someone to hell? You're not actually going to believe that, are you?"

In today's First Lesson, the Old Testament people of Judah were confronted by two different messages. One was the message of Jeremiah, and all the prophets that preceded him. Jeremiah had been proclaiming a message of God's judgment on Judah. The Babylonian army, led by King Nebuchadnezzar, had already attacked Judah once, taken many of the Jews into exile, and swiped many of the beautiful temple furnishings as well. This is what God had predicted through his prophets for ages, but the people didn't listen. Now God gave them another message through Jeremiah. God told the people to submit to the Babylonians, and in God's own time which was going to be 70 years, the people would be delivered. But that's not what the people wanted to hear. It's what they needed to hear, but it's not what they wanted to hear. Another message came from a so-called prophet by the name of Hananiah. He spoke a message that the people left behind in Judah wanted to hear, even though the message was by no means what they needed to hear. Hananiah told the people that God was going to rid Judah of those nasty Babylonians within two years. The people would be free again, the furnishings from the temple would be brought back, and life would go on as if nothing had ever happened. Nice thought, but it was painfully obvious to any honest person that Hananiah was just trying to win a popularity contest. He wasn't transmitting the Lord's will to the people.

Whom should the people of Judah listen to? The one who told them what they needed to hear, or the one who told them what they wanted to hear? Jeremiah himself analyzed the situation in the First Lesson for today. With a sarcastic tone he said to Hananiah and all the people, "**Amen! May the LORD do so! May the LORD fulfill the words you [Hananiah] have prophesied by bringing the articles of the LORD's house and all the exiles back to this place from Babylon.**" Then he hit them with the hard cold reality. "**Listen to what I have to say in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people: From early times the prophets who preceded you and me have prophesied war, disaster and plague against many countries and great kingdoms. But the prophet who prophesies peace will be recognized as one truly sent by the LORD only if his prediction comes true.**"

If it's so obvious to see the true voice of the Lord when we look at the history of God's Old Testament people, why is it so difficult for us to recognize the true voice of the Lord today? If we can

recognize the true voice of the Lord's will when it applies to somebody else, why do we choose to ignore the true voice of the Lord's will when it is directed at you and me? If we know that ignoring God's will puts us on a crash course with hell and Satan, then why do we treat the devil like he's a cute little kitty cat, rather than the roaring and devouring lion Scripture calls him? Part of the struggle is the source of that other voice, that voice that opposes God's will and leads us from it. The source of that voice is in us, in our world, and in our natural ally. The source of that voice is the sinful nature in us and sinful influences around us that prefer to align ourselves with Satan. And the presence of that sinful nature within us, let alone the sin it leads us to commit, is enough to expel us from heaven forever.

But just as we fall into the trap of that other voice, the first messenger has something more to tell us. That first messenger, the voice of God in his Word, told us what we need to hear about God's law, and now that messenger tells us something more: not a message of confrontation and condemnation, but of consolation and comfort. That message of God's Word shows us how the Lord's analysis of our sin is unswervingly accurate, but it also shows us how God's solution for our sin is the unmatched divine solution for our dilemma. The message of Scripture shows us God's seriousness about righteousness as he provides us with the righteous life of his Son. The message of Scripture shows us the reality of God's anger against sin as his wrath is poured out on his Son hanging on the cross. And the message of Scripture shows us God's love for we who were lost, as death and hell lose their power because of Jesus' resurrection and victory.

If I listen to the wrong car mechanic, it might cost me a couple hundred bucks. If I listen to the wrong dentist, it might result in some unpleasant pain and equally unpleasant dental work a years down the road. But if we listen to the wrong spiritual message, it will cost us far more than that. Fortunately, amidst all the opposing messages out there, God has revealed to us the one message that matters. It's the message found in his Word. It's a message that our sinful natures don't care to hear, but it's a message our souls need to hear and delight to hear. It's a message of full and free forgiveness through the redemption and forgiveness secured by Christ at Calvary, and that's a message we will only find in Scripture. This message may not be the most popular. This message may not make people like you more. This message may not make people happy, but this message is the one that we as sinful people need to hear over and over again. Thank you God for giving us this message of truth found in your saving Word! Amen.