

Sermon Draft

Text: Jeremiah 28:5–9

Sermon: “Hard News”

Jeremiah prophesied in the last days of the Kingdom of Judah, the remnant of Israel before their enemies overwhelmed them and took away their kingdom. Yet the glory of Israel will long outshine the glory of Babylon. Jesus, who sits on King David’s throne, will reign forever as the rightful King of Israel and the nations.

That’s what the prophets of the Lord have testified. Many kingdoms would rise and fall along the shores of the Euphrates River. The Babylonians would sack Judah, but Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylonian empire was only a temporary placeholder in the stream of human history. For a while, they would dominate the people of God, steal their treasure, and hold their princes captive. How could the Lord allow it? Isn’t he a defender of his people?

The question is an old one, but not a good one. It is built on the assumption that earthly success, honor, and glory naturally come to God’s people.

What's more, their behavior or whether they're acting like his people is irrelevant in some minds. Thus, even in our age, we hear the voice of false prophets like Hananiah: "If you have faith, God will heal you." "If you have faith, God will keep you from hardship." "If you have faith, God will protect your things."

Through the ages, those who have trusted Hananiah's message have been deceived into believing that God's place is to give them stuff. Jesus will fix all your problems. He is in heaven to give you what you want. Name it and claim it. But Jesus said, "***Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal***" (Matthew 6:19). He is telling us we shouldn't listen to Hananiah or his heirs.

What is so bad about listening to Hananiah? First, false prophets like Hananiah try to make us far too comfortable with earthly comforts and kingdoms. Just like some false prophets today, he tries to tell us that God is a supporter of the homeland. The old Prussian nation no longer exists. It was mostly Lutherans.

The army that could not give them victory wore belt buckles that said, “God is with us.” The Hananiahs say, “God is a patriot who will support our land even though the Israelites had sacrificed their children to the Baals and we have sacrificed ours in abortion, now even in infanticide. He’ll fight for us even though we rage against his children and pass ungodly laws and call them freedom.”

The false prophets teach, “God will bless Israel even though they’ve turned to false gods and worshiped and served them instead of the true God.” “God will bless us,” Hananiah says, “even though in many schools we can put a picture of a mass murderer like Joseph Stalin on the wall, but we can’t hang a picture of Jesus. We can teach from Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* but not from the Gospel of Matthew.”

Second, Hananiah doesn’t speak like a prophet. This one is a little harder to understand. Jeremiah teaches, “*The prophets who preceded you and me from ancient times prophesied war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great kingdoms*” (v 8). Real prophets don’t forget that even the ground we walk on is cursed (Genesis 3:17).

The nations we see will topple. The possessions we have will leave us unsatisfied and unsaved. And the earthly accomplishments, skills, and glories will pass away forgotten by time (Ecclesiastes 1:11). Even the miracles we seek from God have to do with earthly healing, paying bills, and getting success.

Yet the true prophet might remind us that even those Jesus healed during his earthly ministry have now died. Most pastors will minister to parishioners on their deathbeds. It's surprising how often the family of the dying person will try to keep the pastor from talking about death. We all need to be ready to stand before the judgment seat of God. Pretending it won't happen is neither wise nor faithful. False prophets turn us away from looking at the truth of our life and death and therefore our need for a Savior who dies and rises again.

Third, Hananiah preaches that God must bring peace and earthly victory. Jesus said in our Gospel lesson, ***“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth, . . . but a sword”*** (Matthew 10:34).

But isn't Jesus the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6)? Yes, he is. But his peace is not a peace that comes from surrendering to his enemies or sacrificing truth or love for the sake of quiet. Jesus is the King of the Church Militant. Jesus does not peacefully coexist with evil. He does not seek a compromise with those who defy his Father's will. He does not use the tools of evil to fight evil. Jesus overcomes evil by taking all its lies, threats, fury, and murderous rage and coming out alive and victorious.

Jeremiah may sound like a prophet who prophesies doom . . . and he is! But it is doom to the false hopes and false dreams of false prophets. Jeremiah prophesies about the God who does not lose no matter how strong or popular his enemies appear. Jeremiah teaches the Word of God that does not determine right or wrong based on an opinion poll, but on his all-knowing love for his people. Jeremiah teaches about a God who preserves his people even though kingdoms, rulers, and fortunes perish. His victories are timeless, and his people are eternal.

Most important, Jeremiah teaches us how to tell true prophets from false ones. ***“As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes to pass, then it will be known that the Lord has truly sent the prophet”*** (v 9). Throughout the generations, the consistent prophetic message has been proclaimed. Like Jeremiah, the true prophets have told us God will raise up a Savior who cannot be corrupted and will not fail (Jeremiah 23:5; 33:14–26). They have preached words of ultimate hope, ***“I will be your God, and you shall be my people”*** (7:23). God will bring salvation to all nations (16:19), and they will share in his glory (4:2). The Lord God himself will come to Jerusalem to be the world’s Savior and King (3:17). God will not be content to allow the record of salvation to be merely ancient teaching; he will give his people knowledge of salvation and will preserve the faith (31:33–34).

These prophetic messages and many more have come true through the work of Jesus Christ, the one of whom all the prophets spoke. He has delivered his people from sin, death, and the power of the devil.

He has brought true and eternal peace that can come only from him. He has endured all the deadliest weapons of the enemy and was victorious. He even defeated death. All the nations have heard the voice of his prophets and his people have his words written on their hearts.

In the end, Jeremiah proclaims to us real Good News instead of misleading dream from Hananiah and all the false prophets. How do we know? Because through Jesus Christ, all the words of the apostles and prophets have come true. In him, we have peace.

Amen