

Third Sunday after Pentecost

BEARING JESUS' YOKE

Jeremiah 28:5-9

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Analysis by Bruce K. Modahl

5Then the prophet Jeremiah spoke to the prophet Hananiah in the presence of the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the LORD; 6and the prophet Jeremiah said, "Amen! May the LORD do so; may the LORD fulfill the words that you have prophesied, and bring back to this place from Babylon the vessels of the house of the LORD, and all the exiles. 7But listen now to this word that I speak in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people. 8The prophets who preceded you and me from ancient times prophesied war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great kingdoms. 9As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes true, then it will be known that the LORD has truly sent the prophet."

DIAGNOSIS: Yoked to Babylon

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *God's Judgment Comes to Pass*

In 597 BCE the Babylonians first laid siege to Jerusalem. They deported to Babylon much of the leadership, including the young king Jehoiachin. They emptied the temple of its treasure and took it to Babylon as well. Johoiachin's uncle, Zedekiah assumed the throne as vassal king to Babylon. The Babylonians were harsh overlords. Unrest within the Babylonian military and stirrings in Egypt led a segment of those left in Judah to plan revolt.

Jeremiah did not come by his nickname “Terrible Terror” without reason. He consistently proclaimed that God’s punishment was coming in the form of enemy invasion from the north. With these new developments he did not change his message. He dramatized it by putting a yoke over his shoulders and proclaiming their only hope was to submit to the Babylonians and accept their rule as God’s punishment for their idolatry, injustice in the law courts, injustice in the economy, and refusal to repent.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis: (Internal Problem) : *Trusting in a Lie*

Of the prophets Jeremiah was almost alone in his pessimism. Hananiah was the leader of the yea-saying prophets. In the temple precincts in August of 594 BCE Hananiah faced Jeremiah down. He took the yoke from around his shoulders and broke it. He said, “Within two years I will bring back to this place King Jehoiachin, and all the exiles from Judah who went to Babylon, says the Lord, for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.” Jeremiah answered in the words of this Sunday’s texts. He answered, “May the Lord do as you say. I hope you are right. But precedent is on my side. All the prophets before us prophesied war, pestilence, and famine. The only way we will know if you are right is if what you say comes to pass. And there has been no mention of repentance out of your mouth. Meanwhile you already have seen the outcome of my prophecy.” Jeremiah’s adversaries demonstrate the great resistance we have to hearing a critical word from God or submitting to God’s judgment. We will trust a lie (28:15) before we will open our ears to the truth about our bondage to sin from which we cannot free ourselves.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *The Consequences of Rebellion*

Hananiah called for rebellion against Babylon. But because Babylon was God’s instrument of punishment he called for

something much more than that. He called for rebellion against God. Sometime after their confrontation in the temple Jeremiah sought out Hananiah. Jeremiah told him, "Therefore thus says the Lord: I am going to send you off the face of the earth. Within this year you will be dead because you have spoken rebellion against the Lord." We well know the rest of the story. Judah rebelled. The armies of Babylon returned to destroy the city and the temple and take many more people into exile in Babylon.

PROGNOSIS: Hearing God's Promises

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : "Terrible Terror" *Prophesizes Hope*

Once the worst happened Jeremiah became a yea-saying prophet. He prophesied a new covenant, one not written on stone but inscribed on their hearts (31:33). He prophesied return, restoration, and peace. He told Hananiah, "As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes true, then it will be known that the Lord has truly sent the prophet." Jeremiah's hopeful words came to pass when the people returned from exile. However, that can be only a penultimate fulfillment of his words of hope. We know the prophet's words are true because Jesus rose from the grave. He broke the yoke of sin and death from our shoulders. The law can coerce our behavior but only the good news of Jesus crucified and raised for us can change our hearts. The gospel changes our hearts and inscribes upon them the new covenant. Jesus breathes God's peaceful Holy Spirit upon us. He restores us to one another as brothers and sisters since by baptism he is our brother. He opens the way for us to the kingdom of God.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : Trusting Jesus When I was a little shaver I broke a window in the garage door. I knew from Sunday School that I was obligated to confess to my

father what I had done. After my father came home from work he sat in the living room reading the newspaper. Before walking in to stand before him I stuffed one of my books down the back of my pants to absorb the swat I was certain to receive. I'm not sure how my father kept a straight face, but he did. I made my confession. He told me the broken window was his fault because he had driven a nail directly in the path of the window pane. He placed it there to hold a shovel off the floor without taking the swing of the door into account.

Times have changed and I believe there are more effective means of discipline than corporeal. However, that afternoon with my father I learned two things. I learned my father was trustworthy. I also learned that by stuffing the book down my pants I demonstrated an unwillingness to accept the discipline I deserved. I also demonstrated a failure to trust my father's mercy.

After all that Jesus has done for us we know that we can trust him with our lives. He gave his life for us. We turn away from the Hananiahs who proclaim peace when there is no peace. We close our ears to the purveyors of cheap grace and entitlement grace. (The latter term I believe was coined by Elizabeth Eaton, the presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.)

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Yoked to Jesus*

Yoked to Jesus we can bear to hear the truth about ourselves. We are able to acknowledge that we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves. We do not have to deflect the critical word about our lives and conduct. We are able to repent because we know that for Jesus' sake God forgives us all our sins.