

# "But Is It True?"

Text: Jeremiah 28:5-9

May God the Holy Spirit remain living and active in your heart, continually reminding you that you are a holy, sinless, child of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and therefore also an ambassador of that same Lord Jesus, representing him to the world. Amen.

Fellow sinners who have been declared holy in Christ Jesus:

My guess is that you've heard or asked the question that forms the title of this morning's sermon before, and that it was undoubtedly in connection with something that sounded great, but that you strongly suspected to be a pile of malarkey. Even now when we hear the question, images of used car dealers and door-to-door salesmen likely pop into our minds. In general, it's never a positive question, is it? The clear implication is that what you are hearing just isn't so, no matter how wonderful it sounds.

In fact it would probably be a good idea if everyone at every political speech would periodically all shout the same question in unison – just to remind each other of the credibility level of all the ridiculously impossible promises that are made.

It is, after all, easy as could be to paint an overly optimistic picture of the unknown. So easy to promise things that could possibly be true, but most likely aren't. Easy to say things like, *"These cars run for 500,000 miles, minimum"* and *"This is the last vacuum cleaner you will ever have to buy."* But is it true?

If we have learned to be skeptical about such claims in the secular, how is it that our society is becoming so naïve in accepting such claims when it comes to spiritual or religious assertions? As a nation that is exactly what we are seeing – those who would never allow themselves to be sold a preposterous bill of goods when it comes to their money who are nonetheless proving gullible in the extreme when smooth talkers peddle utter spiritual nonsense that imperils their eternal souls.

Our text proves this is really nothing new, and therefore offers a very timely warning. That text is found in the Old Testament Book of Jeremiah, the 28<sup>th</sup> Chapter:

<sup>ESV</sup> **Jeremiah 28:5-9** *Then the prophet Jeremiah spoke to Hananiah the prophet in the presence of the priests and all the people who*

*were standing in the house of the LORD, <sup>6</sup> and the prophet Jeremiah said, "Amen! May the LORD do so; may the LORD make the words that you have prophesied come true, and bring back to this place from Babylon the vessels of the house of the LORD, and all the exiles. <sup>7</sup> Yet hear now this word that I speak in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people. <sup>8</sup> The prophets who preceded you and me from ancient times prophesied war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great kingdoms. <sup>9</sup> 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."*

These are the words of our God, given to us through verbal inspiration by the Holy Spirit speaking through the Prophets of old. We have great confidence in these words and in their ability not only to guide and direct us, but to actually keep every single promise that they make. That our God would so fill and direct us also this morning, so also we study these words with this prayer in our hearts: **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

Before we can get a sense for what we are being taught this morning in our text, we need to understand the context or setting. At the time these words were spoken, the Northern Tribes of Israel had already been essentially annihilated by the Assyrian army – utterly defeated and deported to foreign lands, never to be heard from again. That happened in 722 BC. The remaining Jews (from the Tribe of Judah) had also recently been defeated and plundered by Babylon. The sacred objects that had been used in the temple had been carried off, together with the cream of Judah's population. The citizens of Judah that remained were understandably dejected and disheartened. Things looked very, very bad for the Jewish nation. The inevitable result was that they were hungry for any bit of good news that anyone at all could bring them. Anything at all that was positive or that offered a glimmer of hope would be most welcome.

Into this setting walked the prophet Hananiah, and he gave the people exactly what they were looking for – a divine revelation that all of the captured artifacts and all of the leading citizens that had been carried off into exile would be returned within two year's time. This was obviously great news, and the people soaked it up. They hung on every word and the words of the prophet gave them what *they* at least believed they needed the most: hope. They were in no mood to ask the one question they needed to ask: *"But is it true?"*

The problem? Hananiah was a false prophet. Although he claimed to be the oracle of the God of Israel, the message he brought was a figment of his imagination – a pure fabrication.

But it made him very, very popular with both the people and their rulers. After all, a "man of God" was speaking, so the words just had to be true.

Yet what the people of Judah needed most at that particular moment in time was not hope, it was *truth* and it was repentance. Their country was awash in the pollution of idols and their conduct was actually *worse* than the pagans that had possessed the land before them. Yet rather than change their behavior, rather than clean up their act, they clung to the words of a prophet who told them that God would just overlook their sin and perversion and somehow just make everything right again.

Human beings love to believe the lie, especially when the lie offers hope. More than that, they love to believe the lie when it appears to offer divine immunity from the results of their sinful actions.

Into this setting then walked the Prophet Jeremiah, a *true* prophet of God, who spoke the words recorded in our text: ***"Amen! May the LORD do so; may the LORD make the words that you have prophesied come true, and bring back to this place from Babylon the vessels of the house of the LORD, and all the exiles."*** Jeremiah loved his people, but he loved his Lord more. Although he longed for Judah to be spared the hardship and misery that he himself had been told to prophesy, Jeremiah also knew that God didn't lie. The sum and substance of his statement to Judah was, therefore: *"That would be great, if only it were true."*

What undoubtedly had to be running through the Prophet's mind was this: *"Why would, why should the Lord relent concerning the calamity he had prophesied, given the fact that the people still refused to repent?"* Jeremiah knew the mercy and kindness of his God, but not in the face of stubborn rebellion, unbelief, and perversion. That's why we hear the skepticism in the words of Jeremiah that follow in our text: ***"Yet hear now this word that I speak in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people. <sup>8</sup> The prophets who preceded you and me from ancient times prophesied war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great kingdoms."*** In other words, he was saying that this was something very new and different that Hananiah was prophesying – something unique and different from all that had been spoken before. He pleaded with this to ask the question: *"But is it true?"*

So what was the big deal here? Wasn't Hananiah just giving the people hope in a very dark and discouraging time? What's wrong with bringing hope into someone's life? Isn't that a good thing?

Only when that hope is based on the reality of God's Word. The problem with what Hananiah did was that it caused the people not just to cling to a lie, but therefore also to continue in their sin and unbelief. The "hope" that Hananiah offered actually helped to destroy eternal human souls. If, after all, God's prophet was telling them that all would be made right in under two years and that no further evil would befall them, then why change? Why repent? Why turn from the idolatry and unspeakable perversions that they were committing on a daily basis? Why indeed.

So what happened? As punishment for what he had done, God ended Hananiah's life a year and a half after he spoke his lies to Judah. God absolutely detests false prophets and the damage they do to human souls. As for Judah, far from returning in just two years, the exiles did not return from captivity for another 70 years.

Why are we told these things? As always, Scripture was not preserved and delivered to us all these centuries later for our entertainment but so that we would learn – both from the mistakes of others and to learn how to properly examine our own hearts and actions.

We are in no way immune from the temptation to surround ourselves with those who speak only words that we want to hear, words that we find agreeable. You and I also want to hear those who will assure us that everything is going to be fine, even if we continue in sin. We too can be mesmerized by orators who sooth us with oily words of comfort and hope – even in the face of ongoing perversion and sin. We too can get worn down by those who with authority assert that there are many paths to God, many bridges by which we can pass to paradise. But hear this well: In so speaking the false prophets are not only helping to pave the broad road that leads to destruction, they are dismantling the only real bridge that exists, which is salvation through faith alone in Jesus Christ. That old Adam within us doesn't want to be bothered with repentance and self-denial if all of those other bridges get you to the same place with so much less hassle and condemnation of evil things are flesh still desires. Who needs a Savior when God supposedly declares that there is no longer any such thing as sin? Indeed, if every bridge will get you there, the

bridge that is Christianity looks downright rickety and rather unappealing.

The damage done by modern-day false prophets cannot be overstated. It is absolutely tragic. We too need to continually reevaluate everything we hear according to that simple Biblical standard: *"But is it true?"*

In contrast with all of this darkness shines the Biblical truth of genuine Christianity. God did not and does not overlook sin. His incredible solution to the world's sin problem was to punish his Son, Jesus Christ, instead of the sinners who clearly deserved such punishment. Because of what Jesus did, and because of God's declaration that the world's sin debt has been paid in full by his Son, human beings are now saved when they are brought to trust that Jesus paid their sin debt for them. Far from the invention of human beings, this is God's truth, God's declaration: ***"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. <sup>18</sup> Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God."*** John 3:16-18

To such simple, lovely, profound, saving truth the unbeliever finally asks the right question: *"But is it true? Can it really be that simple?"* God's answer is, *"Yes it can, and is."* This *is* the simple, unique truth by which we are saved. It is true not because man says so but because God says so. It is true because this message of hope is rooted in truth and has its origin with God himself.

That is exactly why you and I value our Bibles as we do – because there alone we find that which saves, that which is without error of any kind, that which offers true, real comfort. False prophets will always be with us and they will always do terrible damage to human souls. Treasure instead the truth that you have been brought to know and believe. Celebrate not sin, but repentance and forgiveness. Though all those around you drift from the path of life and walk the broad road to destruction, may God the Holy Spirit preserve you on the path of life eternal, confident that eternal forgiveness and eternal life are yours alone through faith in Jesus Christ. Amen.

## Scripture Readings

<sup>ESV</sup> **Romans 6:12-23** Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. <sup>13</sup> Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. <sup>14</sup> For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. <sup>15</sup> ¶ What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! <sup>16</sup> Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? <sup>17</sup> But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, <sup>18</sup> and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. <sup>19</sup> I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification. <sup>20</sup> ¶ For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. <sup>21</sup> But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. <sup>22</sup> But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. <sup>23</sup> For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Matthew 9:35–38, 10:5-8** And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. <sup>36</sup> When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. <sup>37</sup> Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; <sup>38</sup> therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." <sup>5</sup> ¶ These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, <sup>6</sup> but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. <sup>7</sup> And proclaim as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' <sup>8</sup> Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay.

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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The Third Sunday after Pentecost – June 25, 2017

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 32 (Stanzas 1-3) (Red Hymnal)

"Redeemed, Restored, Forgiven"

## The Order of Service – Hymnal page 15ff. (Red Hymnal)

## The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**The Epistle Lesson:** (Romans 6:12-23) One of the most misused and misunderstood passages in the Bible is "judge not." Our society rips those words from their context and promotes the idea that Jesus thereby told us never to condemn any action as sinful. Yet not only did Jesus once say, "Go, and sin no more" our first reading condemns sin as that which belongs to our old Adam, not the new man. We want nothing to do with the sins that used to enslave us, and which God himself condemns.

**The Gospel Lesson:** (Matthew 9:35-38, 10:5-8) Though our society disparages God's Word as flawed and outdated, they will often quote it out of context to "prove" their misconceptions. One of those popular misconceptions is that the gospel is all about the promotion of what is today called "social justice." Jesus however told us that his kingdom is not of this world. Christians naturally practice love and compassion, but as a fruit of faith, and it is by faith alone that we are saved. The Christian faith is not "do this" but "Christ paid for all of your sins."

## The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – (Hymnal page 22)

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 222 (Red Hymnal)

"Look, Ye Saints, the Sight Is Glorious"

## The Sermon – Text: Jeremiah 28:5-9 (Printed on the back page)

**"But Is It True?"**

## The Offertory – (Hymnal page 22)

## The Offering followed by the Prayers

## The Pre-Communion Hymn – 312 (Stanzas 1 & 4) (Red Hymnal)

"Lord Jesus Christ, Thou Living Bread"

## The Preparation for Holy Communion (Red Hymnal page 24ff)

## The Distribution

## The Nunc Dimittis (Red Hymnal page 30)

## The Benediction

## The Closing Hymn – 32 (Stanza 4) (Red Hymnal)

"Redeemed, Restored, Forgiven"

## Silent Prayer

**Welcome!** - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune** – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

## Attendance - Sunday (31) Ave (45)

## This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service w/ Holy Communion
	<b>-12:00 p.m.</b>	– Annual Church Picnic
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship/coffee time

**CLC News** – Pastor James Albrecht is considering the call to St. Luke's of Lemmon. Teacher Joshua Ohlmann has accepted the call to Grace of Sleepy Eye MN. Holy Cross School of Phoenix has called Teacher Amy Osborne. Faith Lutheran School of Markesan has called Teacher Nathan Wales. Pastor John Hein has accepted the call from the CLC Board of Missions to be the Part-Time Visiting Missionary to Liberia. Teacher Amy Mielke is considering the call to Messiah School of Eau Claire.

**Church Picnic** – Our annual Church Picnic is scheduled for this morning immediately following the worship service. The location is the Jaycees Park on Century. The main dish (chicken) and drinks will be provided. Everyone is asked to bring a side dish, salad, and/or dessert. Please see Cindy or Sandy if you have any questions.

**TVBS Housing** – We have an opportunity to help with the Travelling Vacation Bible School effort by again hosting a team as they pass through on Saturday, July 1. Please let Sandy know if you could provide housing.

**VBS** – This morning we hope to finalize the schedule for this summer's Vacation Bible School. Families and volunteers are asked to meet briefly immediately after the service this morning.