

# "If Only It Were 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 Jesus Christ:

"If only it were true." If you haven't personally used that sentence, I'm guessing you've heard it often enough. Probably in connection with something that sounded great, but that you knew to be a big ol' steaming plate of nonsense. Even now those words conjure up images (depending on your age) of used car dealers, late night television ads, or internet click-bait. "Try this one simple trick to lose 30 pounds overnight!" In general, "if only it were true" is never a positive statement, 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 these words in unison – just to remind each other of the credibility level of all the promises that are being 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 aren't. "These cars run for 500,000 maintenance-free miles, minimum." "This is the last vacuum cleaner you will ever have to buy." Sounds great – if only... (Although I guess no one has to buy a vacuum cleaner.)

If we have learned to be skeptical about such claims in the secular, how is it that we are becoming so naïve in accepting such claims in the spiritual realm? 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 are nonetheless proving gullible in the extreme when smooth-talkers peddle utter spiritual nonsense that imperils their eternal soul.

Our text proves that this is really nothing new. It was true in the Prophet Jeremiah's day, it is true today, and we should fully expect that it will always be true – clearly then a very timely warning. Our 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."*

This is God's Word, given to us through verbal inspiration by the Holy Spirit speaking through the Prophets of old. We have absolute confidence in these words and in their ability not only to guide and direct us, but to fulfill exactly what they promise. That our God would so fill and direct us also this morning, so also we pray: "**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, predominantly 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 nation of Israel. 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 those words gave them what they needed the most: hope.

Just one small problem. He was lying. 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 a manufactured message that gave them false hope. They needed *truth* and they needed 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.

Evidently no one stopped to ask the obvious question: "*Why would God change when we have not?*"

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 of God, including 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 message was, therefore: "*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. The prophets of God had prophesied doom *if Israel did not repent and return to him*. Man cannot wait God out. Man cannot choose to remain in sin and unbelief and expect God to accommodate. You and I also need to be reminded of that immutable truth. Then, as now, we have no right to expect that our loving God will reward us for sin and rebellion.

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 had kindled God's wrath in the first place? 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 to normal inside of two years, the last of the Jewish exiles did not return from captivity for another 150 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 – and our society, in general, is obviously doing a very poor job of it.

Look around you. To whom are the people flocking, even those who call themselves Christians? They are surrounding themselves with anyone and everyone who will tell them that all is well. They are mesmerized by orators who oil them with soothing words of comfort and hope – even in the face of their ongoing perversion and sin. Even worse than that, they celebrate those who assure them that there are many paths to God, many bridges by which they can pass to paradise. That's idolatry, and 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 truly exists: salvation through faith alone in Jesus Christ. Who wants to be bothered with repentance and

self-denial when all of those other bridges get you to the same place with so much less hassle? 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 extremely unappealing.

The damage done by modern-day false prophets cannot be overestimated. It is utterly tragic. Their message *would* be wonderful, if only it were 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 simply 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

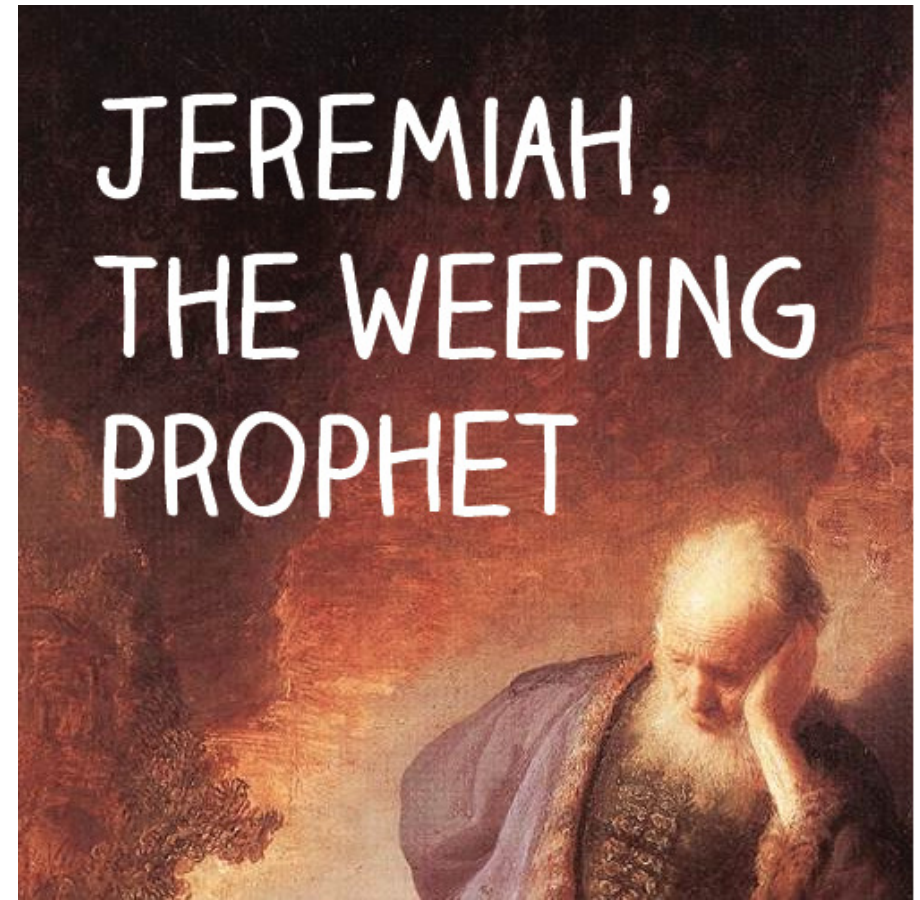
To such simple, lovely, profound, saving truth it's the unbeliever's turn to react: *"If only it were true; if only it were that simple."* Yet this *is* the truth, not because man says so but because God says so. It is true because this message of hope is rooted in the truth as God himself has declared it.

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. False prophets will always be with us and they will always do terrible damage to human souls. Treasure instead the truth that you have come to know. Celebrate not sin, but repentance and forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ. Though all those around you drift from the path of life and walk the broad road to destruction, God the Holy Spirit preserve you on the path of life eternal, confident that forgiveness and eternal life are yours as a divine gift through faith alone in Jesus Christ. Amen.

ESV **(Romans 4:13-25)** For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. <sup>14</sup> For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. <sup>15</sup> For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression. <sup>16</sup> That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring-- not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, <sup>17</sup> as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"-- in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. <sup>18</sup> In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be." <sup>19</sup> He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. <sup>20</sup> No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, <sup>21</sup> fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. <sup>22</sup> That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness." <sup>23</sup> But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, <sup>24</sup> but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, <sup>25</sup> who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

ESV **(Matthew 9:9-13)** As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him. <sup>10</sup> And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. <sup>11</sup> And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" <sup>12</sup> But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. <sup>13</sup> Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

ESV **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."



# JEREMIAH, THE WEEPING PROPHET

## ST PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: [www.bismarcklutheran.org](http://www.bismarcklutheran.org)

Mick Johnson, President Angela Pfennig, Organist  
Michael Roehl, Pastor

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost– June 11, 2023

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

### The Opening Hymn – 37 (Red Hymnal)

"Lord, 'Tis Not that I did Choose Thee"

### The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

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

**The Epistle Lesson:** (Romans 4:13-25) Although Abraham's conduct was certainly exemplary, it was not by his actions that he was judged to be righteous before God. Like each one of us, Abraham was saved by faith – in his case, faith in God's promise to send a Savior.

### Psalm 51 (Supplement page 31) (Brown Hymnal)

**The Gospel Lesson:** (Matthew 9:9-13) What a comfort to know that Jesus came to save sinners, for that is what each of us truly is. The Jewish leaders of Jesus' day condemned him for associating with "sinners" – which is how they labelled those who, in their judgment, were not earning heaven by their conduct. The reality is that no one can earn heaven by good works. We are saved by faith alone in Jesus.

### The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – (Projected on screens)

### The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 742 (Brown Hymnal)

"Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven"

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

**"If Only It Were True"**

### The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

### The Prayers

### The Baptism Hymn – 753 (Brown Hymnal)

"Let the Children Come to Me"

### The Baptism of Jaxson, Amaya, and Zaida Carver

### The Pre-Communion Hymn – 306 (Stanzas 1 & 4) (Red Hymnal)

"Lord Jesus Christ, Thou hast Prepared"

### The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

### The Distribution

### The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

### The Benediction

### The Closing Hymn – 644 (Red Hymnal)

"Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow"

### 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 Holy Communion** – In obedience to God's Word, we practice "Close Communion." This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting anyone 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 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, not in judgment of anyone's Christian faith.

### Attendance – Sunday (45) Average (42)

#### This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Hour
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Hour

**CLC News** – Pastor James Naumann is considering the call to Calvary of Marquette. The CLC General Pastoral Conference is scheduled for June 20-22 in Eau Claire.

**Church Council Notes** – Five of six Council members were present for the meeting on 6/7. May offerings exceeded monthly budgeted needs and the General Fund balance is now positive. The St Paul Endowment Fund has been established and can now accept offerings. Our weekly podcast is plagued by gremlins that have thus far eluded capture. Next Council meeting is scheduled for July 23.

**Confirmation Sunday** – June 25 has been designated as this year's Confirmation Sunday. Our lone confirmand this year is Gabriel Jonas. As is our custom, a fellowship meal is planned to follow the Sunday service.

**VBS and Church Picnic** – Vacation Bible School is scheduled for July 31-August 4, and the annual Church Picnic for Sunday, August 6.

**On-call Vacation** – Pastor Roehl is scheduled to attend a family reunion from Monday through Friday of this week. He can, as always, be reached on his cell in case of emergencies.