

# "Recklessness"

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."

Sydow Catechism – the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment

Text: Jeremiah 23:19-32

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours in endless supply from God our heavenly Father, and from our Lord, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians, you hear it every once in a while – someone acts irresponsibly and, though unintentional, injures or kills another human being. The law refers to such actions as "reckless endangerment," and the penalties are significant. In some ways it doesn't seem quite fair when two men are given virtually the same sentence – one for *intentionally* and *willfully* harming or killing another human being, and the other for *accidentally* doing the same thing while, for example, acting recklessly. After all, one *meant* to do what he did, the other did not.

Not fair, that is, until you see the grieving loved ones. For them there is little comfort in knowing that their loved one was injured or killed *accidentally* rather than *willfully*. Both the result and the sorrow are the same.

This morning we examine more closely the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment: "*You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*" As with all the Commandments, we will be reminded that there is both a negative and positive here – both a "don't do this" and a "but do this." What we will also find is that when it comes to bearing false witness about what God's Word says, there is no real distinction in the results of breaking this commandment willfully or breaking it accidentally. In other words, it will matter little to unbelieving souls on the Day of Judgment whether they were led astray by willful deceit or by reckless falsehood. When false teaching results in unbelief, eternal condemnation is the result. As is always the case when we take a closer look at God's Commandments, there is much more here than first meets the eye.

The text that will guide our study this morning is found recorded by God the Holy Spirit in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Chapter of the Book of Jeremiah:

**ESV Jeremiah 23:19-32 Behold, the storm of the LORD! Wrath has gone forth, a whirling tempest; it will burst upon the head of the wicked. <sup>20</sup> The anger of the LORD will not turn back until he has executed and accomplished the intents of his heart. In the latter days you will**

**understand it clearly. <sup>21</sup> "I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied. <sup>22</sup> But if they had stood in my council, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people, and they would have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their deeds. <sup>23</sup> "Am I a God at hand, declares the LORD, and not a God far away? <sup>24</sup> Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the LORD. <sup>25</sup> I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, 'I have dreamed, I have dreamed!' <sup>26</sup> How long shall there be lies in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart, <sup>27</sup> who think to make my people forget my name by their dreams that they tell one another, even as their fathers forgot my name for Baal? <sup>28</sup> Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let him who has my word speak my word faithfully. What has straw in common with wheat? declares the LORD. <sup>29</sup> Is not my word like fire, declares the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces? <sup>30</sup> Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, declares the LORD, who steal my words from one another. <sup>31</sup> Behold, I am against the prophets, declares the LORD, who use their tongues and declare, 'declares the LORD.' <sup>32</sup> Behold, I am against those who prophesy lying dreams, declares the LORD, and who tell them and lead my people astray by their lies and their recklessness, when I did not send them or charge them. So they do not profit this people at all, declares the LORD.**

This is God's Word. Trusting both that God's Word is always true and in his promise that he would meet with us and bless us through the study of his Word, so we pray, "**Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!**" Amen.

Several things in our text ought to jump out at us. The first is the repetition of the phrase "**declares the Lord.**" That phrase is, in fact, repeated by divine inspiration *ten times* in our text. The logical question we should ask is *why? Why did the Holy Spirit verbally inspire Jeremiah to repeat that same phrase over and over again?* In fact if you look through the entire Book of Jeremiah you will find that he repeated this phrase (or a slight variation thereof) *178 times*. Again, why?

While it would be both foolish and arrogant for any mortal human being to claim to fully comprehend all of God's intents or purposes, God himself gave us some answers here. Jeremiah was dealing with the aftermath of the work of the false prophets in Israel. As we heard

in our text, part of God's message to the people of Israel was his opposition to those prophets who had been passing off their own personal message as that which came from God himself: **"I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied."** And again in verses 31-32a: **Behold, I am against the prophets, declares the LORD, who use their tongues and declare, 'declares the LORD.' Behold, I am against those who prophesy lying dreams, declares the LORD, and who tell them and lead my people astray by their lies..."**

In sharp contrast to the *false* prophets, Jeremiah repeatedly hammers home to the Jews this critical fact: *"These are not MY thoughts and words, they are God's."* Nor did he use the generic word for "God." He used God's own personal title by which he identified himself to the Children of Israel and by which he distinguished himself from all false gods. That personal title is identified in most Bible translations by the word LORD (all capital letters). Over and over (178 times in this Book alone) the Holy Spirit repeated the phrase through Jeremiah: **declares the LORD.**

Why was this so important? Why did God the Holy Spirit find it necessary to hammer this fact home to the Jews over and over again? Because heaven or hell hung in the balance. The words of the false prophets led to unbelief and hell. The words of the LORD led to heaven. Again from our text: **"I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied."** <sup>22</sup> **But if they had stood in my council, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people, and they would have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their deeds."** And again, **"Behold, I am against those who prophesy lying dreams, declares the LORD, and who tell them and lead my people astray by their lies and their recklessness, when I did not send them or charge them. So they do not profit this people at all, declares the LORD."**

Though this sounds like pure law, don't miss the divine *love* in God's message through Jeremiah. The words of the false prophets led to unbelief and eternal damnation. God's purpose and desire for every single human being was and is eternal life through faith in the Promised Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Note also the sharp contrast with our society's idea that "truth" and "salvation" come to us today through a variety of different religions and religious leaders, or that truth is whatever an individual wants it to be. That notion isn't from God. It's not even from man. It comes directly from

Satan himself. In fact that's a perfect example of the very thing God is condemning in our text – when human beings pass off the devil's lies as though they came from God. The whole point of God's message through Jeremiah was that not only is he himself *the only source of truth*, all other non-sanctioned messages *lead to eternal destruction*.

That's the first thing that should jump out at us in our text – God's repeated use of the phrase **"declares the LORD."** The second thing that should grab our attention is God's use of the word that forms the title for our study this morning: **"Recklessness."**

How or why is this such an important word? In part because *recklessness* is one of our "wink-words." It's one of those words or stories that rightly ought to bring shame to God's children, but that we instead speak or retell with something of a wink and a nod – as though we are taking a certain amount of pride and satisfaction in what should provide us neither. Bragging, for example, about the "wild days" of our youth, how fast we used to drive, how much we used to party, or the times we broke the law and got away with it should never be things of which we are proud. Christians should never glorify what our God sees as only sinful – and therefore shameful.

"Reckless" and "recklessness" are often used in that way. We tend to look with a certain amount of admiration at those who are reckless *and get away with it*. Yet how everything changes in an instant when the reckless person doesn't "get away with it" – when that recklessness causes injury, death, and heartache. Make no mistake, God never regards recklessness as amusing or admirable. He makes that clear in our text when he condemns the false teachers for **"lead(ing) my people astray by their lies and their recklessness."** These words drain all the "cute" and "admirable" out of the thing, don't they? The *words* of the false teachers led souls to their eternal destruction. What makes this even more tragic is the fact that God says in our text that not only was the evil avoidable, the opportunity to use their words to save souls was right there in front of them. From our text: **"But if they had stood in my council, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people, and they would have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their deeds."**

Stop and let that sink in for a minute. By their lies *and by their reckless speech* (their casual mixing of "I say" with "God says") the

false teachers not only led those entrusted to their care to eternal destruction, they threw away the opportunity to speak the words that would instead have brought life. Do you suppose it will matter to the souls in hell whether those who led them there did so intentionally or just recklessly? Obviously not. For them, the result is tragically and eternally identical.

Which brings us finally to the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment ("*You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor*") and what that statement of God's Holy Will means to you and me today. Clearly, God hates all lies. Satan's lies destroyed God's perfect creation. Lies condemned his Son Jesus. Lies destroy countless souls every single day. Lies ruin lives and reputations and they destroy trust.

Yet the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment is about much more than just lies. It is God's holy prohibition against every reckless word, every statement that intentionally or unintentionally harms rather than helps – every word that tears down rather than builds up. "False witness" is more than just lying. It includes every word spoken from an unloving heart. That can include even telling the truth when that truth is told to harm rather than help. And that's just the negative things – what God *forbids* in the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment. We haven't even touched on the positive things that God in the Commandment *demands*: "*We should defend (our neighbor), speak well of him, and explain all his words and actions in the best possible way.*"

All of this is obviously and critically important, but all of this would amount to little more than legalism, moralizing, or pietism to us if we fail to look at this statement of God's will in the larger context of his absolute love for his fallen creation, including every single soul, individually. God hates both lies and reckless speech because he never loses sight of the fact that precious, blood-bought souls hang in the balance. His anger burns hot against every single false witness because it causes eternal damage to the precious and eternal souls that he sent his Son to save. When you and I look at it from God's perspective, we want absolutely no part in the destruction of even one human being. We ask God therefore to give us a renewed appreciation for the affect our words have on others. Words – *our* words – can tear down or build up; they can encourage the broad path to hell, or they can point to the narrow path to heaven.

This is the truth God told us to share: God sent his Son to rescue fallen mankind. His Son, having lived a perfect, sinless life, then offered that life on the cross of Calvary as the once-and-for-all sacrifice for the sins of all

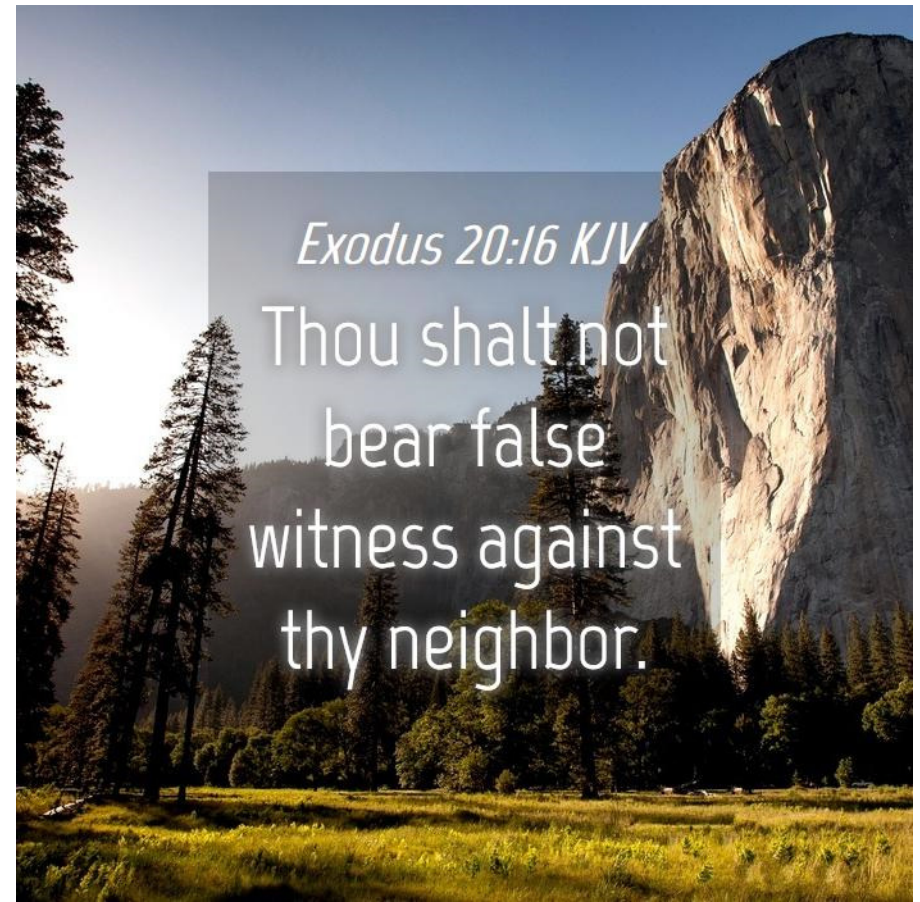
mankind. When God now sees faith in Jesus Christ in our hearts, he sees us as sinless, holy, pure – the debt for every single one of our sins having been paid for by Jesus Christ. We don't have to earn God's love and forgiveness; we already have it through faith that his Son has already paid our sin debt in our place.

Every lie, every reckless word, in some way – great or small – detracts from that message, that saving truth of salvation by God's grace through faith alone in Jesus Christ. That's why the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment is such a big deal. Not because you and I need to keep it if we hope to be saved, and not because by keeping it our own personal reputation or honor will be enhanced. It is so important because God has chosen you and me to share with the world that one simple truth that can avert that most unthinkable, eternal disaster and instead guide souls to their Savior's side in heaven for all eternity. Who would dare to take risks with so important a responsibility? Who, in realizing just what we are talking about here, would even consider treating that sacred trust with carelessness or recklessness? Let *everything* lead to Jesus. Amen.

ESV **Colossians 4:2-6** Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. <sup>3</sup> At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison-- <sup>4</sup> that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. <sup>5</sup> ¶ Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. <sup>6</sup> Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

ESV **Mark 14:55-61** Now the chief priests and the whole Council were seeking testimony against Jesus to put him to death, but they found none. <sup>56</sup> For many bore false witness against him, but their testimony did not agree. <sup>57</sup> And some stood up and bore false witness against him, saying, <sup>58</sup> "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.'" <sup>59</sup> Yet even about this their testimony did not agree. <sup>60</sup> And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?" <sup>61</sup> But he remained silent and made no answer.

ESV **Jeremiah 23:19-32** Behold, the storm of the LORD! Wrath has gone forth, a whirling tempest; it will burst upon the head of the wicked. <sup>20</sup> The anger of the LORD will not turn back until he has executed and accomplished the intents of his heart. In the latter days you will understand it clearly. <sup>21</sup> "I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied. <sup>22</sup> But if they had stood in my council, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people, and they would have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their deeds. <sup>23</sup> "Am I a God at hand, declares the LORD, and not a God far away? <sup>24</sup> Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the LORD. <sup>25</sup> I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, 'I have dreamed, I have dreamed!' <sup>26</sup> How long shall there be lies in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart, <sup>27</sup> who think to make my people forget my name by their dreams that they tell one another, even as their fathers forgot my name for Baal? <sup>28</sup> Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let him who has my word speak my word faithfully. What has straw in common with wheat? declares the LORD. <sup>29</sup> Is not my word like fire, declares the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces? <sup>30</sup> Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, declares the LORD, who steal my words from one another. <sup>31</sup> Behold, I am against the prophets, declares the LORD, who use their tongues and declare, 'declares the LORD.' <sup>32</sup> Behold, I am against those who prophesy lying dreams, declares the LORD, and who tell them and lead my people astray by their lies and their recklessness, when I did not send them or charge them. So they do not profit this people at all, declares the LORD.



*Exodus 20:16 KJV*  
Thou shalt not  
bear false  
witness against  
thy neighbor.

# ST PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

**BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA**



# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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Michael Roehl, Pastor

**The 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – August 18, 2024**

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 11 *(Red Hymnal-207 Melody)*

"Safely through Another Week"

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

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

**The Epistle Lesson:** (Colossians 4:2-6) This morning we examine the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment, which really involves much more than God's prohibition against lying. The Holy Spirit through Paul points out in our first reading one of the positive aspects of the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment. In other words, it is not only God's will that we avoid words that are wrong or hurtful, it is also his will that our words carry to the world the saving truth of Jesus Christ and him crucified for sinners. Our words should build up, not tear down.

## Psalm 100 (Supplement page 35) *(Brown Hymnal)*

(Mark 14:55-61) There are many reasons why God hates lies. It was a lie that first led Adam and Eve into sin and ruined God's perfect creation. It is only through lies that human souls are led to worship false gods. And, as we learn in this lesson, it was through lies that man tried to condemn their perfect Savior.

## The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. *(Brown Hymnal)*

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

"Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven"

## The Sermon – Text: Jeremiah 23:19-32 *(Printed on the back page)*

**"Recklessness"**

## The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

## The Post-Sermon Hymn – 759 *(Brown Hymnal)*

"These Are the Facts"

## The Prayers

## The Benediction

## The Closing Hymn – 785 *(Brown Hymnal)*

"Children of the Heavenly Father"

## Silent Prayer

**Welcome!** - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States and around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again.

## Attendance – Sunday (29) Average (38)

### This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Hour
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>-6:00 p.m.</b>	– Church Council Meeting
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Hour

**CLC News** – Pastor Michael Gurath has returned the call to Grace of Sleepy Eye, MN. Pastor Sam Rodebaugh is considering the call to St. John's of Okabena, MN. The opening service of the new school year at Immanuel Lutheran High School and College is scheduled for next Sunday, August 25<sup>th</sup> at 3:00 pm in the fieldhouse. Pastor Timothy Wheaton has been diagnosed with a rare and aggressive cancer of the thyroid, Stage 4. Please remember Pastor Wheaton and his family in your prayers.

**Church Council Meeting** – The Church Council is scheduled to meet this Wednesday at 6pm.

**Outreach Shirts** – Last chance to order T-shirts and polos. Please consult the sign-up sheets on the mailbox table or direct any questions to Sandy Roehl.

**Myers – Fettig Wedding** – Congratulations to Griffen and Nicole Fettig, who were married at a location west of Mandan yesterday. May our gracious God protect and bless them as they begin their lives together has husband and wife.