

**August 5, 2012**  
**Pentecost 10**

*"Is There No Balm In Gilead?"*

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**JEREMIAH 8:18-9:1**

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**O** my Comforter in sorrow, my heart is faint within me. <sup>19</sup> Listen to the cry of my people from a land far away: "Is the LORD not in Zion? Is her King no longer there?" "Why have they provoked me to anger with their images, with their worthless foreign idols?" <sup>20</sup> "The harvest is past, the summer has ended, and we are not saved." <sup>21</sup> Since my people are crushed, I am crushed; I mourn, and horror grips me. <sup>22</sup> Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no healing for the wound of my people? <sup>9:1</sup> Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the slain of my people.

The prophet Jeremiah has been called the weeping prophet and rightly so. He says in the words just read to you, "Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears." Here is a man, a grown man, a prophet of the Lord, shedding copious tears for the people of Judah and Jerusalem because of their rejection of the Lord. When Jeremiah walked the streets of Jerusalem in the morning he smelled the familiar smells of animal sacrifices offered to the Lord that pictured the great sacrifice Jesus would give on the cross for our sin. When he walked the streets in the evening he could smell the sweet smelling incense the people burned to Baal and Ashtoreth as they sat on their flat roofs and looked up to the stars. This smell of the worship of Baal and other gods was everywhere.

Jeremiah wept because he saw the idolatry of God's people. He wept because they refused to listen to the voice of the Lord calling them to repentance. He wept because the Lord allowed him to see the terrible destruction that was coming to Jerusalem from the hand of the Babylonians.

Imagine for a moment it is August 5, 2001 and you are having terrible reoccurring nightmares of planes crashing into buildings filled with explosive jet fuel. You wake up crying in the night because the dreams are so real. The nightmare becomes true on September 11, 2001 when planes crash into the World Trade Towers and the Pentagon. The Lord gave Jeremiah visions or dreams of Babylonian armies burning the city of Jerusalem, destroying the temple, putting people to death and hauling them off into captivity. How hard it was to see the reality of what was coming in the future.

The Lord has put a burden on us who are living in the last days just as he put a burden on the prophet Jeremiah. Because we believe the words of the Bible are true, we take seriously what our Lord Jesus tells us about the destruction of the world and the final judgment. Jesus speaks about coming in clouds of glory to judge all people and destroying this world in which we are living. He also tells us in the clearest words that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. Jeremiah asks the question this morning, "Is there no balm in Gilead?" Is there no balm, or healing, or salve or medicine that can save people? We are worried about people and where they will spend eternity. There is a balm in Gilead. There is forgiveness and salvation for all people in Jesus their Savior.

## **The sin sick situation**

The only way Jeremiah could cope with the idolatry he saw in God's people was to turn to the Lord for comfort and strength. He says this of the Lord, "Oh, my comfort in sorrow, my heart is faint within me. Listen to the cry of my people from a land far away. Is the Lord not in Zion? Is her king no longer there?" Jeremiah heard the people crying in the land of Babylon, "Is the Lord not in Zion? Is her king no longer there?"

Have you ever heard the screams of child in a pain, or the wail of dog that is in pain after being hit by a car, or the groans of people who are dying? Some of those sounds we never forget. They stick with us. Our soldiers who come back from Iraq and Afghanistan have flash backs to the groans of their buddies suffering from some bomb explosion. Jeremiah had flash forwards to the suffering God's people would go through during the captivity in Babylon. The prophet Isaiah records their plaintive cries with these words, "The Lord has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me." Psalm 137 begins with the words, "By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remember Zion."

Jesus also wept for the city of Jerusalem when he thought of how they rejected him as their Lord and Savior. You recall the words he spoke don't you? "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing." Jesus looked at the crowds of people and had compassion on them because he saw them as sheep without a shepherd.

Jeremiah knew the Lord was not being unfair to his people. Jeremiah heard the Lord say, "Why have they provoked me to anger with their images, with their worthless foreign idols?" When God's people entered the Promised Land he warned them, "If you ever forget the Lord your God and worship and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed." Did they take God's warnings seriously? No, in only one generation they forgot the Lord and started worshipping Baal and other gods? Judges 2 says of the second generation the Promised Land, "Another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he did for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals."

If you watched the Olympics you can see how the city of London has beautiful large cathedrals, but on any given week there are more Muslims in mosques than Christians in churches. Lest we be so presumptuous as to point across the pond at the people who have forsaken the Lord, let us look at our own land and the false idols people have constructed for themselves. In a multicultural society everyone wants God on their own terms. God's plan to save us through Jesus is pushed aside and forgotten.

The Lord tells his people through Jeremiah, "The harvest is past, the summer has ended, and we are not saved." It is August 5 and summer is rapidly coming to a close. Soon it will be fall. The vineyards will begin their harvest. Then the winter rains will come. How quickly time passes. The time for people to repent and turn back to the Lord is always limited and short. Ephesians 5 tells us to make the most of every opportunity because the days are evil. God knows how many heartbeats of time your friend has, or neighbor or members of your family. God allows us to live on this earth and delays his coming so

that people might repent and believe and not perish.

Jeremiah took the welfare of his people personally. He saw their idolatry and felt the pain they would experience when God's judgment came down on them. He says, "Since my people are crushed, I am crushed; I mourn and horror grips me." We see animals suffering and we feel their pain. In the classified ads of the Santa Maria Times, a family has taken out an ad appealing to people to help their dog get surgery. The dog's leg was broken after being hit by a car. We feel the suffering of people in Africa who do not have enough food to eat because of drought and war. We feel the pain of those who are not able to get jobs because the unemployment rate is well over 8%. Mostly we are crushed as we think of people who will perish forever without Jesus. We share the tears of Jeremiah who longed for the people to come to the Lord before it was too late.

### **The wonderful cure**

Jeremiah longed to have his people come back to Lord and be cured. He pictures this cure for sin as a balm in Gilead. He asks the rhetorical question, "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no healing for the wound of my people?" Balm is a medicinal salve. The region of Gilead east of the Jordan River was famous for the resinous trees that produced this wonderful healing medicine that was said to be worth more than twice its weight in silver. When Joseph's brothers went down to Egypt, their father Jacob told them to take a present to the mighty Pharaoh, a little bit of balm.

Were there no medicines that could cure God's people of their sin? Were there no doctors or no healing remedies for the wounds of the people? Is there a hospital in Santa Maria? Sure there is. We have a new state of the art hospital with private rooms. I have had a tour of the new facilities and I am impressed. New doctors are coming to our community to work in such a state of the art facility. We have a new cancer center called "City of Hope."

Is there a place where people can be cured of their problem of sin and have their life right with God so he can welcome them as his dear children and someday provide a home for them in heaven? In Isaiah chapter one the Lord describes how sick his people were because of their idolatry. "Your whole head is injured, your whole heart is afflicted. From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness, only wounds and welts and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil." But then the Lord offers a cure for their sin and rebellion. He says to them, "Come now let us reason together," says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet they shall be white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be like wool."

The healing Jesus offers for sin is not a partial healing. It is complete and whole and perfect. In John 15 Jesus describes himself as the true vine. He says, "I am the vine and you are the branches." Then he says because of who he is we are clean through the word that he speaks to us. When Jesus died on the cross he said, "It is finished!" With these words he announced that a complete payment has been made for the sin of the world. That includes all the things we have done wrong this week that call upon our God to reject us. The complete cure for sin is found in the blood of Jesus that was shed for us. "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin." This is not a partial cure. It

is a complete cure. It is because of Jesus that the Psalmist can say, "For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for us. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." When the disciples saw Jesus on the night of his resurrection they were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. They even saw the nail prints in his hands, the evidence that Jesus had paid in full the price for all their unfaithfulness.

"Is there no balm in Gilead?" Yes, there is. The cure is complete in Jesus. He wants this cure come to all people. He leaves us here on this earth to invite people every where to come to this Balm in Gilead to cure the sin soul and make the wounded whole. Amen.