

Female Speaker 1: Good morning. This morning, our first reading comes from Jeremiah. You will see it on page 541 in the red Bible, page 541, Jeremiah chapter 8 verses 18 to chapter 19 and then the first verse in chapter 9. *Oh, my comforter and sorrow, my heart is faint within me. Listen to the cry of my people from a land far away. Is the lord not in Sion? Is her king no longer there? Why have they provoked me to anger with their images, with their worthless foreign idols? The harvest has passed. The summer has ended and we are not saved. Since my people are crashed, I am crashed. I mourn and horror grips me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no healing for the wound of my people? Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes are fountain of tears. I would weep day and night for the slain of my people. The word of the lord.*

All: Thanks be to God.

Female Speaker 1: Reading comes from 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy. You'll find it on page 839 in the red Bible if you'd like to follow along. So, it's 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy chapter 2 verses 1 through 7 on page 839. I urge then first of all that request prayers intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone for kings and all of those in authority that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good and pleases God, our savior who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth for there is one God and one mediator between God and men. The man cries to Jesus who gave himself as a ransom for all men. The testimony given in its proper time and for this purpose, I was appointed a herald and an apostle. I am telling the truth. I am not lying and a teacher of the true faith to the gentiles. Thanks to be God.

All: All thanks to him.

Myron Penner: The holy gospel of our lord, Jesus Christ according to St. Luke.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Myron Penner: Our gospel is found in the 16<sup>th</sup> chapter of Luke's gospel beginning at verse 1. This is called the Parable of the Shrewd Manager. Jesus told his disciples, there was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions, so he called them in and asked him "What is this I hear about you, giving account of your management because you cannot be manager any longer." The manager said to himself, "What shall I do now?" My master is taking away my job. I'm not strong enough to dig and I'm ashamed to beg. I know what I'll do so that when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses. So, he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, "How much do you owe my master?" "800 gallons of olive oil", he replied. The manager told him, "Take your bill. Sit down quickly and make it 400." Then he asked the second, "And how much do you owe?" "A thousand bushels of wheat", he replied. He told them, "Take your bill and make it 800." The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted truly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind and or the people of the light. I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with

much and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So, if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own? No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. The gospel of Christ.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Myron Penner: Please be seated. Let's pray together. Father, we have acknowledged your presence here among us and we invite your holy spirit to be active in our hearts and in our minds and in our lives and that these spoken words of mine might be faithful to the written words of holy scripture and that they would lead us all to the living word, Jesus Christ, our lord and savior. Amen. As interesting as it would be to talk about the shrewd manager instead of dishonest manager. I think it's interesting that they call it the shrewd manager because he just was dishonest. Right? And he was nonetheless rewarded for that and actually commended for it. I will put my time around here right now. Oh, forget it. I'll just note. I'm not going to listen to it anyway. Just kidding. Jeremiah, that's where we are at right now in our servants and we're looking through the readings that we've been having from Jeremiah and today, we have a particularly interesting one and I wanted to just very quickly read it for you again because it's not very long and I want you how you would preach this one. Oh, comfort or in sorrow. Jeremiah says. Actually, oh my comforter. And this is the only translation I know that translates that way. It's very, very ambiguous. Nobody knows what that little portion actually says, actually I think the footnote here tells you that but anyways. My heart is faint within me. Listen to the cry of my people from a land far away. Is the lord not in Sion? Is her king no longer there? Why have they provoked me to anger with their images with their worthless foreign idols. The harvest has passed. The summer has ended and we are not saved. Since my people re crashed, I am crashed. I mourn and horror grips me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no healing for the wound of my people? Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes are fountain of years. I would weep day and night for the slain of my people. So, what strikes you about this passage immediately viscerally? Pardon?

Male Speaker 1: Mournful.

Myron Penner: Very mournful. Lament. I don't know if I have heard more eloquent articulation of grief. Have you? I've read it in different translations so I get it mixed up but oh that my head were a spring of water and obviously the poetry is really strong eluding to the fact that he's always used the image of winter, I mean summer and there's been a bad harvest and they're not saved and there's no hope in oh that there would be. Is there no balm in Gilead? Gilead was well-known as a healing place sort of probably like what these are called? Like you know where there's spa. Right? Where there were springs of sulfur water that was supposed to be good for you and it was well-known as a healing region. What else strikes you about this passage? Who's talking?

Male Speaker 2: Sometimes he's getting ...

Myron Penner: Say this really loud. Start right at the very beginning so everybody can hear.

Male Speaker 2: It's confused this reading because sometimes interpreting the verses that Jeremiah was prophetically speaking towards his people and in other times it's Jeremiah speaking for his people as well, so is like Moses went back and forth.

Myron Penner: Absolutely. And that's exactly what's happening. This is one of passages that is sometimes called Jeremiah's confessions and there were almost startling bits of scripture in the old testament maybe in both testaments but for sure, it's something unique in the prophetic literature in the old testament prophecies because Jeremiah has an incredibly intimate relationship with Yahweh with the God of Israel. And I think we always have to keep in mind whenever we hear Jeremiah lamenting like he is here or confessing what is going on in his spirit. We always have to keep in mind. I think it's verse 9 of chapter 1 where it says the lord put its hand upon the mouth of Jeremiah. Everything that's coming out of Jeremiah's mouth has this double aspect. Jeremiah cannot speak the words of Yahweh even when he's speaking to Yahweh and this is why sometimes Jeremiah sometimes refer to as the father of personal prayer and devotion because in a way that it's unique among the prophet of Israel. He has this intimate and not at all cozy relationship with Yahweh, with God.

Female Speaker 2: So, the other literatures go deeply about is people.

Myron Penner: They are his family. You're exactly correct and he doesn't care if the northern tribes of Israel or the southern kingdom of Judah. He cares about them like they are his people and when speaks, he speaks with the heart of God. That's what I want us to focus on today. Last week, what did we focus on?

All: Anger.

Myron Penner: Anger. Shalom?

All: Shalom.

Myron Penner: That's within the same family. I don't want to read into that. I'm not Freud. Anger and shalom. Neither of you are wrong. What else? I heard somebody else.

All: Severeness.

Myron Penner: Severeness of God's mercy or the fierceness of God's grace. Right? All of those things we talked about because they are all part of this relationship that God has to God's people and to God's servant who is Jeremiah. And today, I want to talk a bit about the heart of this father and in particular, I want us to remember this. This is the takeaway. I'm remembering to say up front this time that the heart of God is to heal the world. There is no balm in Gilead. There is a deep, deep wound of God's people and there is a deep, deep wound in creation itself. Do you remember

two ceremonies ago I'm asking to remember a lot but we were talking in Jeremiah 18? We have that little weird Hebrew phrase *tohu wa-bohu*. It was formless and empty and void and he looked and he saw a creation undoing because of the fact that God's people were undoing God's word and when you undo God's word, there's just nothing there. I want to create an image for you. How many you've ever been out on the ocean on a yacht away from the sight of land. Anyone? Or just on a boat? When I was in high school, I was out at a camp called Camp Homewood on island just off of called Quadra Island just off of Campbell River, the main island and they had a sailboat and every week, the counselors in training which I was would go out on the yacht because we weren't part of the main camp and so we got in the yacht and do cool stuff and we'd see oracles and we'd see the first persons algae's, with the seals living through it and stuff like that. Really cool. But I remember one time we went out there in the middle of the day. It was on a Saturday, so campers all left and we had time to ourselves. We're on this yacht and we went out from land and you couldn't see land anymore and I jumped off and went swimming and I'm a great swimmer.

I'm not a great swimmer but I have no problem swimming. How many have you ever gone swimming in the ocean where you couldn't see land? It was freaky. It was like nothing I'd ever done to that point because I suddenly got this impression of being very, very tiny on something that I couldn't control and I almost panic because I thought what if they just sail away and I'm here and there's just nothing to ground me because it just felt like there was. I was suspended over an infinite abyss. Does that too poetic? But I've had that feeling before when I wasn't in the water like something opened up inside of me and there was nothing there to ground it. That I want to suggest is the *tohu wa-bohu*, the formlessness and the void. And I also want to suggest that when we undo God's word that is all that there is left is the formlessness and the void, the chaos. I was reading Walter Brueggemann who is my favorite old testament scholar and he has written a lot on Jeremiah and I don't even know anymore where it is but I haven't written down some notes somewhere that I came across and he just had this one little phrase, the opposite of shalom is not war. It is chaos. War is chaos. It's when the elements are striving with each other when things are no longer in relation and that is what chaos is. And I want to suggest that what. First of all, I need to go back to Jeremiah's sorrow.

I'm jumping ahead. I'm going to two different places here. What I've been trying to suggest to you is that the expression of sorrow that Jeremiah is giving is always as I think Andrew very nicely articulated for us. It's always in this double aspect. See, Jeremiah's prophetic vision is also clear to him that he sees the things that are coming as if they are and he knows his people are already slain because he knows these people will not return to the word of God. They will not repent. They will not go back and they continue on and God cannot let that chaos be the thing that rules the day and he feels that absolutely and what he feels and sees is that the profundity, the deepness of that chaos, that thing that I felt kind about there, only exponentially multiplied because everything that makes sense of the world is being undone. That's what he sees and feels and it's his people who are being undone. The very word that structures the things that are. The very word that structures that are is broken. The Torah, the law that which made God's people God's people no longer applies and we're going to see later that this old covenant is shattered and it cannot be effective anymore.

There has to be a new one so you see what we're going to this. You see how the Old Testament connect to new testament. You see, Jeremiah sees the abyss, the place where God's word is undone where God is not ruling and reigning. This empty unreality and then what he sees instead or God's leader is saying peace, peace. You see that little verse right there in the middle 8, 19, verse 19. The people are saying, is God not in Sion? I take that ironically because there are the leaders who are saying peace, peace when there is no peace. Order, shalom, flourishing when there is just chaos, lack of relationship and strive. And so, I like what. This is also something that Brueggemann said. He said that Jeremiah. First of all, scholars recognize like Andrew said what's saying. It's a very difficult book to read. Some people have said it's unreadable and here's what. I love Brueggemann because it's readable. If you understand that it is a meditation on the abyss. He is speaking when he is looking into the thing that should never ever be. The brokenness of God's word where there is no shalom. So, Jeremiah is personally caught up in every aspect of his people suffering and the suffering is absolute and it goes right. It's the very groaning of creation which is how Paul. It was a phrase that Paul uses in his letter to the Romans. All creation groans longing for the day when it is put right again.

So, this abyss, I want to say and so he's looking at this reality that has quotes around it that we create to make sense of life and how Israel has mortgaged itself out to these other counter realities. These other ways being in the world and making sense in this other God that has somehow are going to give them something to hang onto while they're floating over that abyss and Jeremiah sees it for what it is. He sees that these people are sick that there is something rotten at the core, that there is no balm in Gilead for them. There can be no remedy for this sin sickness that's found in the different ways that we try, the strategies that we have to make meaning and make sense for ourselves and they end up destroying us and the world around us. There's three things I want to say enclosing. Remember, we're talking about the heart of the father and how Jeremiah is actually displaying for us in bodily form in a way that of course is a type of Christ himself. Right? It's prefiguring. The suffering that Jesus has for his people and for the world. So, three things I want to say. First of all, if you think that the world can heal itself, you do not understand the world, the way the father does. If you think that the different strategies that we can come up with will somehow fix the deepest problems if you accommodate the gospel to fit that to be something that we could just do all on our own.

You don't see the world the way the father does. Stan Hauerwas. You've probably heard me quote him before. This one sticks. I've heard him say this in an interview one time. He said, I think that. He goes to an Anglican church and I think that Anglicans need to just stop using the word incarnational because what they seem to mean is that God became a human just like us and lived among us and took a look around and said, this isn't so bad but that's not what incarnation means. It means the opposite. It means there is no balm in Gilead. There is a cure for the wound of my people. You see, if you feel profoundly the sadness of how the world is, you're feeling the sadness of the father. That's the second thing. If you do not experience profound sadness over the state of the world, you do not see the world the way the father does because there is no shalom no matter how much it may be proclaimed.

You see there is the response. One of the beautiful things about Jeremiah that's astounding is this complete and utter lack of self-righteousness. He is 100% identified with his people and suffers with them and his response to it is not 'woah to you'. I'm on the side of the angels. He's fully immersed in that. He feels the pains. He is beaten and persecuted and all of the other things that his people go through and on top of that, it's worst because he carries his incredible burden of having to be the one to announce to the people that he loves that they're really, really wrong but the thing that they think could never happen is going to. So, thirdly, I want to say, if you don't long for the healing of the world, you don't feel for the world, the way the father does. Jeremiah isn't about condemnation. He embodies this intense longing for the healing and he refuses to call the abyss anything other than the abyss.

It is just the wrong thing but there is no condemnation. There is ultimately hope because the one who created out of nothing, who created shalom out of what was chaos can do it again but he refuses to pin his hopes anywhere else. So, if you want to have the father's heart, negatively you will not be accommodating. You will not be self-righteous and you will not be condemning. You will instead understand that the hope for the world is in Jesus Christ and his restoration of the world. You'll feel the profound sadness when the world does not go away of Jesus Christ and you will long for the healing of the world in Jesus Christ. Remember, the heart of the father is to heal the world and God's mission is to heal the world and bring it shalom. Let's pray. Father, we thank you that in the midst of chaos and in the midst of strife and war and a whole litany of things that there are for us to be distraught about, there is your word that comes to us. We thank you that you have shown us your heart for the world in Jesus Christ and in people like Jeremiah who are so faithful to your word. Help us to live as those who are faithful to that word. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.