

St. Peter Lutheran Church - Modesto, CA
✠ **Second Sunday of End Times - Last Judgment** ✠
November 6, 2005

Sermon by Pastor Johann Caauwe

“Say to them, ‘This is what the LORD says: “When men fall down, do they not get up? When a man turns away, does he not return? Why then have these people turned away? Why does Jerusalem always turn away? They cling to deceit; they refuse to return. I have listened attentively, but they do not say what is right. No one repents of his wickedness, saying, “What have I done?” Each pursues his own course like a horse charging into battle. Even the stork in the sky knows her appointed seasons, and the dove, the swift and the thrush observe the time of their migration. But my people do not know the requirements of the LORD.” (Jer. 8:4-7, NIV)

What a glorious day. What a glorious day it will be when our Lord Jesus Christ returns to judge the living and the dead. When Jesus enters his courtroom the charges will be read, the testimony will be given, the verdict will be announced – all out in the open. There will be no more hiding, no more games, no more deception, everything will be laid out exactly as it is. On the last day Jesus will stand on his judgment seat and announce to all people the way things really are. He will tell us how we stand before him. He will mention our deeds and explain how they are indicators of the way things really are in our hearts. If it is faith that is in our hearts, we will have overflowed with deeds of love and kindness. If unbelief is in our hearts, that will overflow with wicked and evil deeds. He will tell us how things really are.

And how are things with you? Do you want to know? Do you wish you could get a little insight into what Jesus will say about you when he comes again? You don't have to wait. God's Word does not change from day to day, so the words of Scripture also tell us the way things really are. That's what this section from Jeremiah tells us. It tells us very strikingly **HOW THINGS REALLY ARE**. It tells us that we are really sinful. And it tells us that God is really gracious.

In this section the Lord compares his people, the people of Judah, with the way things normally are in life. He says, **“When men fall down, do they not get up? When a man turns away, does he not return?”** Isn't it normal, he asks, if a person falls, he usually doesn't keep lying on the floor. If a person takes a trip, most of the time he gets a round trip ticket because he plans to come back. That's just the way things usually work. Or in verse 7 the Lord observes, **“Even the stork in the sky knows her appointed seasons, and the dove, the swift and the thrush observe the time of their migration.”** Even the animals understand the way things normally work and they simply do what is normal for them to do.

But the Lord says, my people don't do that. They keep turning away from me and they don't come back. The animals know what to do and it seems that my people don't know what to do – as if they have no idea what I want them to do. **“They cling to deceit and they refuse to return.”**

And the Lord asks, “Why? Why have they turned away? Why do they always turn away?” God doesn't ask the question because he doesn't know the answer. God knows why, but the fact that he asks the question reminds us that God did not create his people to turn away from him. It wasn't in the mind of God at creation for his people to turn from him and disobey his com-

mands. He didn't cause Adam and Eve to eat from the tree; they did that. They acted against the will of their Creator. They went their way. They pursued **"their own course like a horse charging into battle."** They went down the path that leads to death paying no attention to the hell that awaited them at the end.

And that's the way things are now. By Noah's time, God had noticed that the thoughts of mankind were only evil all the time. And Jeremiah here writes, **"Each pursues his own course..."** This is the way things are...for everyone.

So we probably shouldn't be surprised to see our world the way *it* is. Just take a look at the news – you've got violence, you've got hatred. You've got immorality, greed, you name it – and you don't even have to be watching the national news; and really, you don't have to watch the news at all – take a look around.

The people God was talking about were the people of Jerusalem, God's people, church people. And yet *each* of them was pursuing their own way, oblivious to the dangers that surrounded them. The question is, Do we expect to find anything different here? Do we think that Satan has weakened in his attempts to turn us from God? Do we think that our sinful nature is any less corrupt than the idolaters of Judah? Do we think that maybe we can fill our hearts and minds all kinds of things that pull us away from our God, and then think that everything's fine? Do we charge into our busy lives, pursue our goals – maybe for a career, maybe for retirement – and forget that the goal in life is not *this* life, that will come to a screeching halt the moment we die or Christ returns?

Then what will he say? What will he say about how things really are with us? Really sinful. Totally sinful, totally corrupt from birth. Unwilling to change, unwilling to repent. Completely guilty and fully deserving of eternal death. That's the way things are with us – each of us. That's true now as it will be on the last day. Right now we could hide it. We could deny it or ignore it or minimize it, but on the last day Jesus will make know how things really are – we are really sinful.

Aren't you amazed, then, at Jesus' words in the Gospel for today. If this is the way things really are for us (and for everyone), then when Jesus described the final judgment he should have said, "everyone is going to hell." That is what he should say! But yet there are some to whom Jesus says, **"Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Take the inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world."** There are some who believe him! There are some who have repented of their sins and somehow returned to the Lord their God.

But that doesn't happen because of the way things are with us! We are really sinners, who cannot turn to God on our own. This can only happen because God has revealed to us how things really are *with him*. God is really gracious. We see evidence of that even in this section of Jeremiah.

When God saw his people turning away from him, how did he respond? Did he throw up his hands and say, "Oh, well, I tried. Too bad." No, he repeatedly came to his people through his prophets like Jeremiah and asked "Why? Why do you turn from me?" Again, God doesn't ask the question for his benefit, but for those who have sinned. That's why he asked Adam in the garden of Eden, "Adam, where are you?" God knew where Adam was. "Adam, did you eat from the tree I told you not to eat from?" God knew that Adam had disobeyed God. But God poses a question to those who have rebelled against them and gives them the opportunity to repent.

"I have listened attentively, but they do not say what is right." He asks and then waits for a response. ... But there is no response. God said through the prophet Isaiah, **"All day long I have**

held out my hands to an obstinate people, who walk in ways not good" He waits for someone to confess his sin; someone to repent of his wickedness and turn in faith to God. But there seems to be no one.

And yet just minutes ago you stood before God and confessed that you are by nature sinful and that you have disobeyed God in your thoughts, words, and actions. In essence, you said what God waits to hear, "What have I done?" Just moments ago you confess the Christian faith. You confessed faith in Jesus as the Savior.

You were able to do that, not because of the way things really are with you, but because of the way things really are with God. God is not willing to allow us to continue on the path that leads to death and eternal punishment. We are sinners who cannot convert ourselves. And so he has turned us. He has turned our hearts to him, not by might, not by power, but by his gracious Word. In his own voice he spoke to us and changed our hearts. He takes hearts and minds that have been hostile to him and gives us hearts that love him and rely on him for all things. He takes our stubborn, selfish hearts and teaches us to love because he first loved us. In his Word he speaks to us about life and salvation; he promises and gives life and salvation and so he leads us to love his Word and want to listen to his Word and study his Word; to live in his Word and die in his Word.

With his own Word and a little water he replaces filthy hearts with clean hearts. He sees corrupt sinners who are raging towards hell. He sees them at the brink of damnation and rips them from clutches of the devil, drowning their sinful nature. He washes them in a flood of forgiveness and saves their precious souls. Each time we have the opportunity to witness a baptism or to remember our own baptism, we recall how things really are with God – that God is really gracious.

And on the last day, when Jesus looks at us, he will reveal how things really are with us. We are really sinners. There's no escaping that fact. That's true. But because God is really gracious, we will not stand on his left. We will stand among the saints who have been washed in the blood of the lamb, who have washed their robes and made them white, and there, in the words of the hymnwriter, "When I appear before your throne, Your righteousness shall be my crown; With these I need not hide me. And there in garments richly wrought, as your own bride I shall be brought to stand in joy beside you."

What a glorious day that will be. Amen.