

Lessons From A Potter

Non-Series Jeremiah

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Bible Text: Jeremiah 18:1-23

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The book of Jeremiah 18 is where we are this evening. This morning we looked at verses 1 through 11. We will pick up this evening at verse 12 and read down to verse 23. Jeremiah 18:12. Let's read verse 11 so that we can hear the following verses in their context,

11 Now, therefore, say to the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: 'Thus says the LORD, Behold, I am shaping disaster against you and devising a plan against you. Return, every one from his evil way, and amend your ways and your deeds.' 12 "But they say, 'That is in vain! We will follow our own plans, and will every one act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart.' 13 "Therefore thus says the LORD: Ask among the nations, Who has heard the like of this? The virgin Israel has done a very horrible thing. 14 Does the snow of Lebanon leave the crags of Sirion? Do the mountain waters run dry, the cold flowing streams? 15 But my people have forgotten me; they make offerings to false gods; they made them stumble in their ways, in the ancient roads, and to walk into side roads, not the highway, 16 making their land a horror, a thing to be hissed at forever. Everyone who passes by it is horrified and shakes his head. 17 Like the east wind I will scatter them before the enemy. I will show them my back, not my face, in the day of their calamity." 18 Then they said, "Come, let us make plots against Jeremiah, for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come, let us strike him with the tongue, and let us not pay attention to any of his words." 19 Hear me, O LORD, and listen to the voice of my adversaries. 20 Should good be repaid with evil? Yet they have dug a pit for my life. Remember how I stood before you to speak good for them, to turn away your wrath from them. 21 Therefore deliver up their children to famine; give them over to the power of the sword; let their wives become childless and widowed. May their men meet death by pestilence, their youths be struck down by the sword in battle. 22 May a cry be heard from their houses, when you bring the plunderer suddenly upon them! For they have dug a pit to take me and laid snares for my feet. 23 Yet you, O LORD, know all their plotting to kill me. Forgive not their

iniquity, nor blot out their sin from your sight. Let them be overthrown before you; deal with them in the time of your anger.

I think you would agree that this is one heavy duty passage of Scripture from the beginning in verse 1 all the way down to this 23rd verse. I want to warn us that we must not ignore its application to our own lives. I speak to believers when I say that. We must not ignore its application to our own lives. I've mentioned it from time-to-time here recently but I fear that sometimes what we do is we immediately default to the truth of justification and we forget, as Butch read earlier, thank God for the passage that he read at offering, we forget that it's God's will that we be sanctified. That involves departing from evil. That involves practical holiness. That involves you and I taking seriously God's calls to us to put away sin and to walk in a way that is safe and right and straight. You say, "Well, when passages declare disaster, is that applicable to believers?" Well, not in the final sense but we can sure suffer some temporal disasters, can't we? In addition to that, I would say to you that the proof that you actually are not headed for everlasting disaster is that you heed God's warnings. God's warnings, the warning passages that we find in the Old and New Testaments, those warnings prove to be effectual in the lives of people who have eternal life. We hear the warnings of God and we heed them. Someone like Judah, someone who turns as we'll see in a moment, who turns a deaf ear to the pleading of God, who turns a deaf ear to the warnings of God, this is someone who is headed not just for temporal disaster but for everlasting disaster.

The weeping prophet has spoken for a merciful God. He has set a gracious opportunity before a people who are on their way to a just judgment. We saw this morning that God sent him out on field trips, sent him down to a potter's house. He wanted Jeremiah to see something. There was an illustration for the message that he was to preach and that is the Potter and the clay: God is the Potter, the people are the clay. God has Potter's rights; he is absolutely free and sovereign and these are rights that he actually exercises. Israel is in his hand, that's what he declares, "You are in my hand. You are at my mercy." And God is absolutely righteous. You can count on his character. He is predictable in how he operates. Where there is unrepentant sin, there is judgment and where God meets with a humble heart, a repentant heart, he will relent. He will forgive. He will show mercy. He is absolutely holy and he is gracious at the same time. What a wonder our God is. How thankful we should be for him.

So Jeremiah, this faithful messenger, declares both of those realities. He declares the judgment that is coming from the hand of God upon Judah and he tells them that God will relent if they will repent. Verse 11, the Lord declares through Jeremiah, "I am shaping disaster against you. I am devising a plan against you, like a Potter forming a vessel, so I am forming disaster for you. It is already on its way." As I said this morning, you know, the clock is ticking, the train has left the station, "There is an appointment on the calendar of God for you, Judah, in judgment. It's coming but there's this time, there's this space that God in his merciful nature is allowing for you to repent." So through Jeremiah, God says, "Return. Return, everyone from his evil way and amend your ways and your deeds." As we apply that within this congregation, as I said this morning, I wonder right now what is your evil way? What is the sin that you continue to pursue

despite the gracious warnings that God would offer you? Despite the gracious forgiveness that he holds forth to you in his Son Jesus Christ? Who in this room continues in stubbornness to pursue a way that God warns will result in your destruction?

What will you do with that? What would they do with that? That's what we meet with in verses 12 and following: what would Judah do in response to this message? What we see is heartbreaking. What we see is heartbreaking. We see two things in verses 12 through 17, we see the refusal of God's mercy. God says, "I'll be merciful if you'll repent," and they say, "No, thank you." The refusal of God's mercy, verses 12 through 17 and then the repudiation of God's messenger, verses 18 through 23. They don't just reject God's mercy, they reject the messenger. If you don't like the message, you attack the messenger and that's what they do. So notice first of all, the refusal of God's mercy. Verse 12, "But they say, 'That is in vain! We will follow our own plans, and will every one act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart.'" I wonder how they said this? Well, they certainly said it by their choice. You know, you may never use these words, these words may never come out of your mouth but if you continue to pursue your sin when you've been confronted, that's exactly what you're saying. That's what you're saying by your choice. Those are your words. Let those words sink into your mind and heart tonight. Take it into your own heart because if you are pursuing sin when you have been warned by the word of God to turn from it, this is what you're saying. This message, to me, is hopeless. It is in vain. "I will follow my own plans. I will act according to the stubbornness of my evil heart," is what someone says when they continue without repentance, pursuing sin.

Jeremiah, a faithful prophet, you know, this response should not have surprised him. God told him in advance this is what his ministry would be like. Jeremiah 7:25, earlier in the book of Jeremiah, the Lord says, "From the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt to this day, I have persistently sent all my servants the prophets to them, day after day. Yet they did not listen to me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck. They did worse than their fathers. So you shall speak all these words to them, but they will not listen to you. You shall call to them, but they will not answer you." How's that for an encouraging ministry assignment? "I'm going to send you to preach a message and I'm telling you in advance, they're not going to listen to you, not going to receive it." A couple of very important lessons from that, dear ones. We're reminded that ministry is not measured by response, it's measured by faithfulness. I mean, if Jeremiah adopts a pragmatic way to assess his ministry and if he were to assess his ministry based upon the people's response to what he had to preach, he would have thought himself an absolute failure. But he wasn't, was he? You see, he's got one task: to be faithful with God's words as he declares those words with the passion and the heart that represents the God who gave the words. And so as this man preaches judgment, he does so through tears and as he holds forth the offer of peace with God, he does so through tears. He communicates God's message, not just with words but with attitude and that's faithfulness. It's also a good reminder that what God calls us to in ministry is faithfulness, not ease. Jeremiah was not called to an easy life. God knows the people will reject the message. God tells him the people will reject the message yet God sends him. It's amazing, isn't it? I mean, if I'm Jeremiah, I might protest a bit with that, "Lord, they're not going to listen anyway.

Why are you sending me?" All because the message of God just doesn't rescue, it confirms. It confirms men in their sin. It confirms the true spiritual condition of people.

This is also a good reminder that you are responsible before God for what you hear today, whether you receive it or not. People are funny this way in their sin, they think that somehow if they decide not to listen, that's the end of the story, "I just don't want to hear that. I just don't want you to tell me that. I don't want to be confronted with that." You know, we put our spiritual fingers in our spiritual ears and we say, "I will not listen," as though that's the end of the story. Now listen, listen: mercy is not weakness. God is extending mercy but God is not weak. He is not sitting in the heavens wringing his hands to find out how men will respond to his gracious offers of mercy. That's not God. That's not to say that he does not desire your repentance, he does desire your repentance. We see the heart of God as I said this morning, when Jesus weeps over the city of Jerusalem, there is the heart of God. But God is free, he needs nothing. You see, he is not incomplete without you but you are incomplete without him. So he doesn't offer you mercy for his sake, he offers you mercy for your sake, ultimately for his glory, of course, but nonetheless, you're the one who's needy here, not God. So what God does is he sets before men life and death and he exhorts them to choose life and they're going to be responsible for what they choose in light of what God has revealed, whether they want to think that they are responsible or not. I say to you tonight, loving you, you will be responsible for these things that you hear from the word of God. You will be responsible.

Judah rejects the mercy of God. I want to show you five things about that rejection. First of all, in verse 12, we see the settled unbelief of Judah. The settled unbelief. Their mind is made up but they say, "That is in vain." Literally it translates a word that means "hopeless" or "despair." It's useless. "Jeremiah, what you've talked about here is useless." So the word means "hopeless" or "despair" but what does it mean in this sentence? What does it mean in this particular context? It's somewhat difficult to know. A couple of possibilities, first of all: it could mean useless in the sense of disregard. That's how some people take this. "What you say to us is useless in this sense, we're not going to listen. Keep on talking. It's useless for you to talk to us because our minds are already made up." Hopeless. Vain. "What you say is vain. We are not going to receive it." We meet with that sometimes, don't we? We meet people like that. Recently I was trying to witness to a gentleman who told me that he is an agnostic. I was trying to open the door for a conversation with him and at one point, he was very polite, he was very nice, he was a gentleman in that sense but he told me in his own way that he wasn't interested in what I had to say. He said, "I don't blame you, though, for making the effort." So what was he saying to me? "It's useless. It's vain. You could talk all that you want to and I'm not going to listen to you so you can stop right there. Thank you for the effort."

Or, it could mean here that it's useless in the...the word is translated again and again in the Old Testament "hopeless." So they could be saying this: "It's a hopeless situation, Jeremiah, because we're not capable of that. This is beyond our ability to change." Hopeless in the sense of despair. "Keep preaching but it won't happen in my life." We also meet with people like that, don't we? Someone says something like this, "I just wish I could believe what you do. I mean, I want to. I wish I could. I wish the Lord would do

in my heart what he has done in your heart." Do you realize some of these people actually gather regularly with the Lord's people, gather regularly under the preaching and teaching of God's word just saying, "I just sort of hope that it takes? But, I am what I am. That just isn't me. It's just not who I am." Can I tell you, one of those responses is not more admirable than the other. Both of those responses are despicable. Both of those responses are evil. Both of those responses are actually insulting toward God. Those are damning responses and yet people compliment themselves on each of those responses. You know, there is a person who says, "Well, at least I'm not a hypocrite. I'm just going to tell you straight out I don't want to hear it. Isn't that better than people who pretend they want to hear it? It's vain, you see. Isn't it better that I just tell you that up front?" As though there is something to be applauded or they deserve some sort of compliment because of their stubborn, rebellious heart.

Or there's the person who thinks himself or herself to be more humble. You know, "I wish I were like you. I wish I could believe what you do. It's just not me. I'm not as good as you are," that's sort of what they are trying to say. "I'm a different kind of person than you." You say, "Well, how is that insulting to God?" You see, it underestimates what God does when he saves anyone. We're all made of the same stuff, aren't we? One big, fallen lump of clay. That's what God started with when he saved us so if you're sitting next to someone who loves Jesus Christ and you don't love Jesus Christ, I want you to know that they were once just like you; exactly like you; no better than you; no different than you; made of the exact same stuff. You see, this is insulting to God because it acts as if God offers something that he's not willing to perform. "Turn to me and you'll live," well, who makes someone alive? Who changes the heart? Who transforms the life? Who grants new birth? Who forms a new creation? Is it not Almighty God? This same all powerful God is full of grace. He just says to you, "Turn. Look to me. Look to my Son. Are you willing?"

You see, whichever way you take this, it's still a true statement in this sense: whether they know it or not, these people in their responsive, they are actually describing their true condition because without repentance, it is vain. Their situation is hopeless. Without repentance there is no hope. Without repentance nothing fits except despair. Look throughout your Bible and you'll never find salvation without repentance. You don't find a changed life until first there's been a broken heart so if you're not willing to humble yourself, if you're not willing to turn from your evil, if you're not willing to prostrate yourself before God and ask God to do what only God can do in a human life, if you're not willing, then there is no hope for you until you're willing. No hope. It really is a desperate situation.

Maybe someone would say, "What do I do if I don't want that? I mean, what if I know in my mind that this is the right thing but I just don't have any desire for it in my heart?" I would say to you, "I know someone who is able to grant repentance. I know someone who promises that if you'll seek him with all your heart, you'll find him," and so I would say to you, "Get on your face before God and don't get up until you've repented. Seek him with all your heart and you will find him." Jeremiah 29:11, later on the Lord will say this about the future of the nation of Israel and he says, "For I know the plans I have for

you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you," give you, "a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the LORD," isn't that an awesome statement? "I will be found by you and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile." I will let you find me.

So the first thing we see is that they are settled in their unbelief. They declare Jeremiah's message to be one of despair and hopelessness. "There is no chance for this. We will follow our own plans and will everyone act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart." And make no mistake about it, dear one, when you are stubborn toward the word of God, the explanation for it is evil and it's evil in your heart. Not only is this stubborn unbelief, settled unbelief, second notice: it's of a singular kind. The singular unbelief of Judah because the Lord through Jeremiah asks a question, "Therefore thus says the LORD," verse 13, "Ask among the nations, Who has heard the like of this?" It's just a way of saying, "Can you imagine this? I mean, can you believe this? This is unbelievable." What Judah is doing is unbelievable. It is a unique kind of disloyalty.

The Lord said this earlier in the book of Jeremiah, Jeremiah 2:10 says, "For cross to the coasts of Cyprus and see, or send to Kedar and examine with care." Go somewhere else and look around, see if there has been such a thing. Listen, "Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods? But my people have changed their glory for that which does not profit." God says, "Do some travel. Travel about and do you know what you're going to find? You're going to find where there are false gods, imaginary gods, made up God's, demonically inspired God's. There are nations that stay true to their particular God." We see some pretty radical, murderous kind of commitment in the Muslim world, don't we? Sometimes it bothers me, I've heard this done with Jehovah's Witnesses, you know, "Oh, if we had half the commitment the Jehovah's Witnesses have." Listen dear ones, that's a demonically inspired commitment, people trying to earn their way to heaven in some cases through murderous acts. But nonetheless it is still true to say that there are people serving imaginary gods, no gods at all, and they stay true to their God. Here is Judah with the true God, with the living God, with a good God, a God who has blessed them in ways no nation has ever been blessed and they are unfaithful to him. This is a singular kind of unbelief. Tragic. Tragic.

I wonder if there's that kind of tragedy in this room. God has been good to you. God has been good to you. He's been kind to you. He has poured out blessings upon you and you continue to demonstrate your disloyalty to him which leads to the third kind of unbelief: it is stubborn, it is settled, it is of a singular kind which makes it shameful. It's a shameful unbelief. "Who has heard the like of this? The virgin Israel has done a very horrible thing." In verse 14, Hebrew scholars say, "You know, this is very, very difficult to translate," and so you're going to see differences in translation but the main point I think is pretty clear and that is that when it comes to the high and lofty places, the mountains of Lebanon, you can count on snow being there and from those mountains you can count on cold flowing streams making their way down but you can't count on this people. You see,

nature is more dependable than these people. Snow on the mountains is more dependable than these people. Water coming down from the mountains is more dependable than them like a virgin proving unfaithful to her betrothed, like snow that disappears where it ought to be or waters that don't run where they ought to be running. Verse 15, "But my people have forgotten me; they make offerings to false gods." Just walk through the history of the nation of Israel and look at how the Lord makes himself known over and over and over again in unbelievable ways and they continue to prove themselves to be unbelieving. Shameful. Shameful.

But there's something else about this unbelief, it is self-destructive. It is self-destructive. Verse 15, "They make offerings to false gods." Well, what's the result of following after these false gods? What happens as a result? "They made them stumble in their ways, in the ancient roads, and to walk into side roads, not the highway." What do you do when you follow false gods? You get off the straight path. You get off the pathway that is safe and true, the ancient roads, the tested roads of the truth of God. You depart from those and you begin to wander down these side roads where you stumble. Travel is not easy. You depart from a safe path for a hard pathway. It's foolish, isn't it? It's foolish.

The result, verse 16, is that this land that God gave you, this land where you have known God's blessing and you could go on knowing God's blessing if you'd just listen to him, this land is being made a "horror, a thing to be hissed at forever." Interesting, this is a people loved by God and they trade the true God who loves them for false gods. The result will be that they will go from being loved to being mocked. Mocked. Hissed at. "Everyone who passes by it is horrified and shakes his head." "Can you believe that? Look at them. Look at where they have ended up." That's what you choose when you choose this settled unbelief; when you choose this singular kind of unbelief; when you choose these pathways that depart from the ancient paths and you go into the byways of sin. This is what you choose, you choose your own destruction. People who can't believe what you've done. People who can't believe where you've ended up. People who can't believe what your life has turned out to be.

But there's something even worse: this is the kind of unbelief that ends with sovereign abandonment. The sovereign abandonment of Judah. Verse 17, "Like the east wind I will scatter them before the enemy." "You see, I won't be your friend. I won't be your helper. I will be your enemy so that I give you over to your enemies." And he says, "I will show them my back, not my face, in the day of their calamity." You can see it, can't you? Can't you see it? There they are in the midst of calamity, there they are in the midst of trouble, there they are in the midst of destruction and what do they do? "Help! Help us, God! Help us!" And God says, "In that day, here's what you're going to see: I'm going to turn my back to you, not my face. You're not going to have my favor. You're not going to have my help. I will abandon you to what you've chosen."

It's not the only place that he says, "I will scatter you." Jeremiah 13:24, "I will scatter you like chaff driven by the wind from the desert." It's a frightening picture, is it not? To think about calling out to God and he will not hear you? He will not acknowledge you? He will turn his back on you? Proverbs 1:22 says this, "How long, O simple ones, will you love

being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge?" Here's the mercy of God, verse 23, "If you turn at my reproof, behold, I will pour out my spirit to you; I will make my words known to you. Because I have called and you refused to listen, have stretched out my hand and no one has heeded, because you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when terror strikes you, when terror strikes you like a storm and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but will not find me." Can I say to you tonight: find the Lord when you can. Find him now. Find him now. Seek him now. Next verse, "Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD, would have none of my counsel and despised all my reproof, therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way, and have their fill of their own devices. For the simple are killed by their turning away, and the complacency of fools destroys them; but whoever listens to me will dwell secure and will be at ease, without dread of disaster." You see, you can't blame God, can you? Because he's offering, isn't he? He's saying to you, "Turn to me. Turn to me. I will pour out my Spirit on you. You will have my words. I will keep you safe. No fear of disaster. Turn to me." So that when you say no, who is to blame when God lets you have what you've chosen and it destroys you?

So this is the first sad picture, verses 12 through 17. What do they do? They reject God's mercy. Jeremiah goes and he proclaims, "Judgment is on the way but God will relent. He will relent, will you listen to him?" And they say, "It's a waste of time. It's a waste of time. We've already made our plans." But it doesn't stop there, does it? You see, they've forgotten God. That kind of amnesia leads to enmity. Where you forget God, there's a hatred that develops. That's what happens when the wicked don't want to hear the Lord's reproofs, amnesia turns to enmity. Verse 18, "Then they said, 'Come, let us make plots against Jeremiah, for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet.'" "The message doesn't end with you, Jeremiah. We don't like what you're saying. You're declaring disaster. We don't believe that to be true. So there are plenty of people that speak the word of God to us but the word didn't have its beginning with you and it won't have its end with you so we'll just get rid of you. We'll gather to ourselves people who will tell us what we want to hear. I will not, we will not pay attention to any of his words." So what do they do? They repudiate the messenger of God. They are ready to destroy him. They plot against a faithful prophet and they try to sell the idea that the problem is not with their response to God's message, the problem is this messenger. We need another messenger. We've seen a version of that within the churches, have we not? "I don't want to believe what you're saying so I'm going to find someone who will agree with me. I'm going to find someone who will tell me that what I'm doing is not actually destructive. I'm going to find somebody who will tell me that what I'm choosing will not actually end up in my sorrow. I don't like what you're saying. Wisdom didn't have its beginning with you and it won't end with you. I'll find someone who will tell me what I agree with already."

So what do you see? You see another expression, this is powerful, you see another expression of God's judgment toward them as God works in the heart of this prophet. What does Jeremiah do? Verse 19, "Hear me, O LORD, and listen to the voice of my

adversaries. Should good be repaid with evil? Yet they have dug a pit for my life. Remember how I stood before you to speak good for them, to turn away your wrath from them." Do you want to know what Jeremiah has been doing? He's been praying for this people. This people are ready to kill him; this people are ready to do away with him. Do you know what he's been doing for them? He's been asking the Lord to turn his wrath away from them. "Remember how I stood before you, God, to speak good for them, to turn away your wrath from them." This is what he's been doing: interceding on behalf of this people, asking God to turn his wrath away from them. Now they want to kill him. So what is Jeremiah doing? He's saying, "Judge between us." That is, he's asking God to be his defender. "I'm your man, God. I'm your prophet, God. You've sent me to them, God, now defend me. Defend me. You hear their words. You listened to the voice of my adversaries. Defend me. Would it be right that good be repaid with evil? They have dug a pit for my life. Remember, Lord, how I have behaved myself with respect to this people." He moves then from asking God to defend him to agreeing with God through prayer, agreeing with God when it comes to the judgment that God has determined to give to this people. You can say whatever you want to say about Jeremiah's prayer, I can tell you this for sure: he is now praying in agreement with the will of God because this is what God is going to do.

And what does he pray? "Therefore deliver up their children to famine; give them over to the power of the sword; let their wives become childless and widowed. May their men meet death by pestilence, their youths be struck down by the sword in battle. May a cry be heard from their houses, when you bring the plunderer suddenly upon them! For they have dug a pit to take me and laid snares for my feet. Yet you, O LORD, know all their plotting to kill me. Forgive not their iniquity, nor blot out their sin from your sight. Let them be overthrown before you; deal with them in the time of your anger." And you know that's exactly what God did. You read verses 21 down to verse 23 and there you see what happened to the city of Jerusalem when they were taken away captive by Babylon. You've taken your friend and made him your enemy. You've taken someone who loves you and prays for you, intercedes for you and you would do him harm. Is there someone sitting here tonight, people are praying for you, reaching out to you, loving you and you make them your enemy? What is the Lord saying through Jeremiah? "Let me show you mercy. Turn before it's too late. Listen for the sake of your own soul and do it now. Now."

I close with this, Charles Spurgeon I think put it well when he said this, "Return now, for the calls of grace may not always come to you. You do sometimes hear a sermon now which touches you, and pricks your conscience; but, in a short time, you may be removed where you will hear no such sermons, or where, though you hear them, they may no longer impress you. I am afraid my voice is so familiar to some of you unconverted ones that you are getting like the miller who can go to sleep notwithstanding the click of the mill, nay, who goes to sleep better in his mill than he does anywhere else; or like some men I have heard of, over there in Southwark, who work inside the great boilers. When a poor fellow first begins to labor in such a place, the deafening noise is horrible to him, he thinks he must die; but, after a while, he get so used to the the reverberation that he could well-nigh sleep notwithstanding all the hammering. It is much the same with hearing the

word; therefore, I pray you, if you have long listened to one who would seek to do you good, yield to the message he delivers to you; before you grow so familiar with it that it loses all its power over your heart, accept it as good tidings of great joy. God grant that you may do so now! While grace calls, do not refuse." While grace calls, do not refuse.

The church would say, amen. Let's pray.

Lord, we stand in amazement that grace calls. You need nothing, we need you. You need nothing, we need you and yet you call us in these gracious, merciful words to turn from our sins and live. I pray for the unconverted in our midst, Lord, let them hear your voice tonight. Let them look to your Son who died on the cross to save sinners like us, who has been raised from the dead and is able to save forever anyone who comes to him. Let them turn and live. Let them get on their face before you and seek you with their whole heart until they find you. Let them look away from themselves and look away from what they can do for themselves and let them look to Jesus who alone saves sinners. Let them look to his perfect merits for a right standing with you. Let them look to his power for the transforming of their life, of their heart. I pray for believers. Lord, we so often just default to justification and think about forgiveness while we go on in our sinning. Let us see that those who have been justified are being sanctified and you call us to be holy people, to put away our sin and to pursue you in faith, trusting in Jesus so that we follow Jesus. Lord, let those who sit before me even as I pray for myself, let us hear the voice of grace and not refuse it. I ask for this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Let's stand together.