

June 28, 2020 – Jeremiah 28:5-9 & Matthew 10:34-42

A while back, I read a really fascinating article on the Popular Mechanics website. It was a historical piece, a slideshow of sort, looking at Popular Mechanics magazine during WWII. And it was striking. Because the entire slideshow, article after article after article, was filled with hope and reassurance and confidence.

Don't worry about the German 88mm guns. America's got a 3 inch gun that's ten times better. Those German bombers may look impressive, but they're nothing compared to our newest aircraft. Those U-boats may be dangers, but they're still no match for our radar and sub hunters.

On and on it went. They even had articles published in 1944 during the worst of the fighting speculating on what America would do with all those leftover Jeeps after we had won the war.

And on the one hand, I truly admired the patriotism and optimism of their writing. It had to be a huge morale boost to their readers to hear this supremely confident, even arrogant, view of America's military might. And yet, at the same time, it still left me a little uneasy. Because, frankly, a lot of it was just a bold-faced lie.

The German 88 was at least on par with the American 3 inch gun. German aircraft were poorly utilized in the war, but their technology was always ahead of ours. And were it not for a very lucky Allied decryption of German radio codes, the U-boat wolf packs would have annihilated all Allied shipping and naval activity in the Atlantic. Popular Mechanics was very good at presenting a lovely fantasy about WWII, but the reality was far more grim.

But then again, that's what people do during times of crisis. They search for peace wherever they can find it. And if they can't find it, then they invent it, pure and simple. That's what I think Hananiah was doing in our Old Testament Lesson. Because, you see, like America during WWII, Judah during this time was at war. But this was a war that they couldn't possibly win.

Babylon was on the move. Assyria to their North and Egypt to their South had already been conquered. And both of them had armies far stronger than anything the Israelites could muster. Peace was out of the question. War was a foolhardy thought. Conquest and death seemed inevitable.

And into the midst of all this hopeless turmoil walks the king's own prophet, Hananiah. "It'll be fine. God will protect us. Two years, tops, and Babylon will head home. Yeah, we've disobeyed God a few times, but he doesn't care about a little idolatry. A little greed. A little immorality. He always comes through for us. You don't have anything to fear."

It was a nice thought. And as Jeremiah hears this prophecy of peace, he tells Hananiah flat out, "Amen! I hope you're right. I hope God does appear and solve all our problems. It'd be great if he did. But let me tell you what I think is going to happen.

"I think God is angry. I think he's been warning you about idolatry and corruption and immorality for the last 200 years and you haven't listened to a word of it. And I think at this point, the people would be better off to listen to all those prophets of the past who spoke about this exact situation that you're in, and not some idiot like you who doesn't know what he's talking about. Because I know what God has told me will happen and it doesn't include peace."

I mentioned last week about how unpopular Jeremiah became because of all the bad news he brought to Judah. And this was yet another one of those harsh messages. A reality check of sorts in the midst of their deluded optimism. And, once again, Jeremiah wasn't appreciated for delivering it. But then again neither was Jesus when he delivered the exact same message.

That's right. For all that we look to Jesus for hope and peace and comfort, His message to us today is very Jeremian. "I have not come to bring peace to the earth. I have come to bring conflict. I have come to bring suffering. I have come, in fact, to bring death."

Because God isn't going to simply sweep in and save the day. He isn't just going appear out of nowhere and clean up the mess that our idolatry and corruption and immorality have created. We made our bed. We have to sleep in it. And as much as He loves us, he's not going to simply erase the consequences of sin in our lives, just as he didn't for Judah in Jeremiah's day. Even when those consequences mean suffering for doing what is right.

He's not going to do it because that's not the peace that he's offering us. When those angels announced Jesus' birth with the words, "*peace among those with whom [God] is pleased*" they didn't mean that Jesus was simply going to come in and erase all our problems. And when Jesus looked at His disciples and said, "*My peace I give to you,*" he didn't mean that following Him would be easy or peaceful.

What those words meant, and what they still mean, is that for all of the conflict and pain and turmoil we feel. With ourselves. With our fellow man. With the world itself around us. We can at least rely on one source of peace in our lives. Peace with God.

Paul tells us today, "*But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit.*" We have been released from that condemnation that Judah suffered for their sinfulness. We been released from the wrath that God bore against them. We have been released from that hopeless Babylonian exile, and given the gift of worshipping in God's holy house forever.

We have peace with God through Jesus Christ. And that may sound like a hollow gift. What's the good of peace with someone who can't get rid of the turmoil in my life? Except that he can. Just because God won't wipe away the effects of sin in this life, doesn't mean he won't wipe them away in the next. In the life that comes after death.

And in that life a prophet will receive a prophet's reward and a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. Now tell me, what good would a prophet's reward do you in this life? The prophet's of the Old Testament were chased by murderous thugs and tossed down into stinking sewers. That was their only reward.

What good would a righteous man's reward do you in this life? The righteous men of the Bible were persecuted and mocked. Thrown in prison and crucified on a cross. That was their only reward.

In the midst of sin, everything is turned upside down. The unrighteous are glorified and the righteous suffer. But in the next life, all will be made right. Because there will be peace with God through Jesus Christ. A prophet who does not foolishly proclaim peace in this life, because he knows there is no peace as long as sin exists. A true prophet only proclaims peace in the life that is to come.

We know that true prophet. And His Word to us has already come to pass. For he declared that though you destroy this temple, he would raise it up again in three days. Though you crucify his body, he would live again on Easter morning. In the resurrection, Jesus proved without a doubt that he truly did come in the name of the Lord. And that his words are trustworthy and true.

So if he tells us that we have a reward waiting for us in heaven, then we have a reward waiting for us in heaven. If he tells us that in receiving him we receive the one who sent him, then we know that the Lord is truly in our midst. If he tells us that in losing our lives we will find them, then we know that no matter what loss may come, we have found something worth far more than this sinful flesh can offer.

We have found eternal life. And we have found peace with him. Amen.