Jeremiah 28:6 He said, “Amen! May the Lord do so!”

I want you to know that the words before us, the very beginning of what it was that Jeremiah, prophet of the Lord had to say, are words that need to be understood as sarcasm, or perhaps we should label them ironic. To tell you the truth, I am a bit torn in exactly how to label them. Some might say that Jeremiah is actually quite sincere in what he is saying here, but I don’t think so. I don’t think so because I understand and know the context in which these words occur. The context is everything!

Jeremiah is actually addressing Hananiah, all the Priests of the Temple, the King, and any member of the Judahite family in his hearing. In other words, he is speaking to everyone! Jeremiah wants everyone to hear his message, to contemplate their lives, to wrestle with the Word of the Lord and to really give some thought to what has been said. You would think all of this should be really easy. Jeremiah was the prophet of the Lord….but here is the problem, Hananiah and a whole bunch of other people, also claim that they are “prophets” of the Lord. A prophet of the Lord is someone who speaks for, who proclaims the message and truth of the Lord God. So again, imagine the situation, you have two different men with two different messages. One is of the Lord and one is not!

Jeremiah’s message is not very pleasant. Jeremiah has been preaching a message of destruction and exile upon the people and the nation. Jeremiah has been calling for repentance because the people of Judah, the only remaining kingdom of God’s people, has clearly abandoned and turned away from the truth and reality of the Lord God. In the opening chapters of Jeremiah 27, the uniqueness of Jeremiah’s ministry and message is made quite clear.

Jeremiah is commanded by the Lord to put on a yoke, yes, an animal yoke. Jeremiah is to strap it to himself and then go all around the country. Jeremiah is then given a three-fold message to the people. First, the nation was going to be defeated and the people carried to exile. This was going to happened because the Jewish nation had despised the Lord, rejected his Word and covenant for the false gods and ideas of the world. The Lord said that everyone should yield to and serve King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Second, the Lord proclaim that any nation or people who oppose this king will be punished and crushed for this rebellion. This message is given to all the kings of all the surrounding nations. Third, the Lord states clearly, that any and all who prophesize that none of this will happen, that instead the Jewish nation was going to be rescued and all its fortunes restored, were nothing more than false prophets. God’s message was that these false prophets should not be listened to because if you did, then destruction, punishment and death was headed your way.

I know, here is Jeremiah, the true prophet of the Lord speaking these things, telling them the truth, but all the while he has this yoke attached to himself. He must have looked silly. He must have seemed to everyone some sort of eccentric, slightly mad-man who was a “little off”! (And now you know why so often religious movies of late seem to show deeply religious people as “a little weird!” It is because of situations like Jeremiah’s.) Imagine this. Who would you listen to? The guy running around with the yoke strapped to himself or to the better dressed, normal looking guy like Hananiah, who had the backing of just about everyone? Tough choice. (NO, I don’t know why God had Jeremiah do it this way.)

And then there is Hananiah. Hananiah has the backing of the King, the Jewish priests and just about everyone. Hananiah is not walking around with a yoke strapped to himself. Hananiah declares that the Lord has spoken to him, that he has a message from the Lord of hope and rescue. Hananiah declares that within two years, the exiles and the treasures already taken will be returned and that peace and prosperity will return to the people and the land as never seen before! Hananiah’s message is upbeat. Hananiah’s message is encouraging. Hananiah declares the goodness of the Lord, the rescue of the Lord, and the deliverance of God’s people. Again, Hananiah declares that he speaks the truth of God, that God had revealed this truth to him as the genuine, prophet of the Lord.

Our text is Jeremiah confronting the lies and falsehoods of Hananiah. It was quite a show. Hananiah proclaims the goodness and love of God. Jeremiah, with his yoke on, proclaims judgment and punishment for abandoning the Lord. Hananiah even takes the yoke off of Jeremiah and breaks it apart, declaring this is how the Lord will break the Babylonian king and power. Jeremiah again declares the absolute falsehood of Hananiah and then Jeremiah states that the Lord has declared that within the year Hananiah would die. All of this took place in the fifth month of the year. The very last verse of this chapter says, **“In the seventh month of that same year, Hananiah the prophet died.”**

 All that Jeremiah has said, did come true. That’s why there is an Old Testament book called “Jeremiah” and not a book called “Hananiah.” Hananiah was the false prophet. Hananiah was a destroyer of souls, the epitome of what a false prophet is.

 All of this got me to thinking. So how do we in today’s world know who and what to follow? There are all sorts of churches out there, proclaiming often vastly different messages. Each one proclaims that they have the truth and that they speak for God. Seriously, just look around, even in our quaint little towns we find how many churches and yes, for the most part, while sometimes the main message is about Jesus the Savior from sin, most of the time the message of one church to another is contradictory. What do we do? How do we determine who speaks truth and who does not? The answer is actually given in our text. Keying off of our highlighted text our theme will be: **LET THE WORD OF THE LORD STAND!**

 I am going to give you three, to me, rather quick ways of determining what is of God and what is not. Way number one. Is the message you are hearing the consistent message of God’s Holy Word? There it is. Measure and weigh everything by the clear and concise Word of God. I want you to understand what I just said, the clear and concise Word of God. There is no doubt that God’s Word is clear and concise. It tells us exactly what we are to believe and follow and exactly what we are to shun and run from. In many cases, applications made where applications are clearly found. Take our whole text. What did Jeremiah do?

 As Jeremiah was confronting Hananiah did you see how Jeremiah used the past prophets as the measure of what was what? The measure was quite simple, “What they said came true.” That simple fact of every prophet has been the measure since Moses. The prophets of the Old Testament are found there because what they said came and was true, even when what they said trashed God’s people and showed them to be lowdown sinners and lost to God. In other words, stick to God’s Word and revelation. You can’t throw out this or that in God’s Word and declare yourself a follower of God. You can’t say, “We no longer believe this or that, we reject this clear teaching and that one too! You cannot teach what is clearly contrary to God’s Holy Word. That means you will need to study and study carefully the Bible and what it says. That means you can’t reject or throw out anything that the Bible clearly says. Either God’s Word is God’s Word or you have a problem!

Following the Lord is very involved. Listen to what the Lord said in Deuteronomy 13:1-3. **“If a prophet or an interpreter of dreams rises among you, and he predicts a sign or wonder for you, and the sign or wonder that he promised you comes true, and he says, “Let’s go after other gods that you do not know, and let’s serve them,” do not listen to the word of that prophet or that interpreter of dreams, because the Lord your God is testing you to see whether you really love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.”** In other words, what the prophet says, must always agree with the truth of God, the very Word of God himself. And that leads us to point two of our lessons.

 Point two could be summarized in this way: God’s Word and truth never contradicts God’s Word and truth! I know, you think that sounds just like what I have already said. Then you missed the very point of our Epistle reading. It said, **“Shall we keep on sinning so that grace may increase? Absolutely not! We died to sin. How can we go on living in it any longer?...In the same way also consider yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”**

 Here is one of the biggest problems we face in today’s Christian world. Churches all over have declared that sin, following sin, being involved in sin, doing sin, does nothing more than bring you the grace of God! In other words, God is love, God will not condemn you! How can you help yourself, God made you that way! Sin is of no account, because God will rescue and save! And just in case you think I am only speaking of one sin of today’s world, well wake up. Every sin condemned by God’s Word is what I am speaking of. If what you are doing is clearly contrary to what God’s Word says, you have a problem with God! You cannot wallow in sin, chase after sin, continue stupidly in sin and declare that it is “okay to do!” If you are not wrestling against that sin and fighting to do what is right, you have a faith problem, the very same problem the people of Jeremiah’s day had.

 Just so you know, the text of Jeremiah that we looked at, chapters 27-28 say nothing of repentance to stop what was going to happen. That’s because the Lord had already decreed it would happen because of their godlessness. You were to repent for the sake of your soul’s salvation, but you would not escape the exile and harsh life to come. On the other hand, Hananiah never said anything about repenting. He declared God was going to save just because, well, because they were Jews and God was love and everything was okay. In truth, Hananiah’s message is the same message found in the false prophets of today. Don’t worry about sin, God is love and it will all be okay!

 Remember, Hananiah was struck down by the Lord. As Christians we do not excuse sin, we realize its horror. We repent of our sins, that means we understand our sins are a terrible dishonor to the Lord our God. To repent means we are deeply sorry and our desire is to stop our sins. And again I will speak to you of the intimate balance we need in dealing with sin. We all sin. We sin every day, perhaps every hour or minute. But we do not lightly give in to sin. We wrestle against it. We might even lose that wrestling match but we consistently fight and wage war against the sins that tempt us. It is when we stop fighting, when we no longer care about sin or when we embrace sin as our right that we have a problem. God does forgive. God has sent Jesus to grant us faith and forgiveness. But sin must never become more important than Jesus in our lives. We are to follow God’s Word, lock, stock and barrel. That means totally and wholey follow the Lord. It is the only way.

 One more lesson. Please know that being a Christian is hard. The world will oppose us, hate us, and if it can it will persecute and kill us. That’s what they did to Jeremiah. That’s what they did to Jesus! Didn’t you catch the words of Jesus in the Gospel, words that actually apply to even the truth found in Jeremiah. Lots of people stood behind Hananiah. Lots of people said he was right and godly and they put their hope and confidence in Hananiah. But Hananiah didn’t have the Lord’s Word, it was Hananiah’s word, a false message contrary to God’s Word. It doesn’t matter how many people declare a falsehood truth or declare a truth falsehood, it is true or false because of God’s Word. So think of and apply the words of Jesus to this lesson:

 **“Do not think I came to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.”** Jesus’ name will bring you hardship, trouble and turmoil in this world. Again, what they did to Jesus you can expect will be your lot in life. So far we have been blessed with wonderful peace in Jesus’ name in this country, but the warnings are there that this is going to change. Don’t be shocked and don’t be surprised, even in your own family, that hostility and rejection of the Lord will be found.

 **“Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.”** Those words are addressed to the disciples of Jesus sent out to preach his Word and his truth. To receive them as the very spokesmen of Jesus and of His father’s truth is our calling. God has given us His servants and ministers for our eternal good. In the same way, spoken clearly in Luke 10:16, to reject a duly ordained, faithful Pastor is to reject the Lord himself. The Church is not a human institution but the very Church of the Lord. As long as that Church and that pastor are faithful and true to God’s Word in every way, to reject him is serious business. To reject the message of Jeremiah, because it was the Lord’s message, brought the condemnation of the Lord. To reject a disciple of Jesus, who carried the Lord’s message, was to bring the condemnation of the Lord. I believe the same holds true today. Your choice is to follow God’s Word or to follow the way the world thinks: Oh, that truth, that law doesn’t apply to me!” That is a dangerous way to think.

 I’ll bet when you heard this Old Testament reading you thought, “What could be preached on that?” Now you know. It is the wonder of the Lord. No matter what, yes, even against the popularity of the world, please follow the Word of the Lord in everything. Amen.