Jeremiah 15:19-21 19Therefore this is what the Lord says: “If you repent, I will take you back, so that you may stand before me. If you say what is valuable, and not what is worthless, you will be my spokesman. Let them turn to you, but you must not turn to them. 20I will make you a bronze wall to this people. They will fight against you, but they will not overcome you, because I am with you to save you and to rescue you, declares the Lord. 21I will rescue you from the hand of the wicked, and I will deliver you from the grasp of the violent.”

I am going to take you back to memory lane. How many of you remember what it was that Pastor Seelow and then even I read after every Old Testament reading? I believe we stopped doing this Bible verse after we got our new hymnals, and if you recall we got the new hymnals in 1994. So it might have been close to 20 years that this Bible verse was used after every Old Testament reading. Remember? It was Romans 15:4. It said, **“For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”**

Honestly, it was a good habit, a good passage to read after the O.T. lesson. (If you are wondering, we stopped because with the hymnal we have (now 29 years old) following the O.T. reading is the Psalm lesson either sung or recited.) It was a good habit because even to this day, in many other churches the O.T. is considered something that has no application or use for Christians. Many think the O.T. is nothing but God’s delivery of and command for upholding of the Law. That’s not exactly right. In truth both O.T. and N.T. contain both law and gospel. Both testaments are God’s Word and beneficial for our learning and instruction. That’s because the discerning reader will find that God’s grace, mercy and forgiveness in the O.T. is just as wonderful as God’s grace, mercy and forgiveness in the N.T. That’s because both are founded on the Christ, in this case Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior.

On this day, as we look at the Word of God recorded by Jeremiah we will see that the true God has not changed in his dealings with the sinner. It is clear that his grace, mercy and forgiveness is found even way back when. Our theme will be: **God’s Way with Sinners.**

Now when you have a theme such as “God’s way with sinners,” you would probably expect that the words of our text were directed toward the Jewish people of Judah. Historically speaking, we know that’s who Jeremiah was sent to preach to. To preach to them and call them to repentance because for quite some time now these people of Judah have rejected and scorned the Word and wonder of God. Jeremiah was looking for repentance, a real change of heart from these people. That wasn’t happening. It caused stress and strain for Jeremiah. So note, our text, words calling for repentance and change are not directed at the unbelieving people of Judah but rather are directed at none other than Jeremiah himself.

Jeremiah! Jeremiah the prophet of God? Pastor, maybe you should go back and study some more. Are you suggesting that Jeremiah had a problem? This text says in verse 19, **“If you repent.”**  Now surely Jeremiah, a holy prophet of God, was not a man who needed such words!

But he was exactly who these words are directed at. He was a man who needed to hear the Lord’s call to repent. It is true, Jeremiah was a prophet of God. He was called to go out and preach a message of repentance to the people of Judah who had turned their backs on God. Everywhere Jeremiah went he saw idolatry, injustice, violence, immorality and in general hearts that wanted nothing to do with the truth of God. No one listened to this call of Jeremiah. The people would not change and times got harder and harder. Jeremiah was laughed at, scorned, imprisoned and cursed by just about everyone. And because of all of this, Jeremiah was fed up, distraught and having a serious moment of weakened faith.

Listen to Jeremiah as he pours out his feelings to God. Verse 10: **“I am so miserable, my mother, that you gave birth to me. I am the man with whom the whole land argues and quarrels…Lord, you understand. Remember me and care for me. Take vengeance for me on those who persecute me. You are slow to anger. Do not take me away. Be mindful that I bear reproach for your sake. I devoured your words when they were found. Your words became a joy for me, and a delight for my heart, because I bear your name, Lord God of Armies. I did not sit in the company of partiers, nor did I celebrate. I sat alone because your hand was upon me. You filled me with indignation. Why is my pain unending and my wound incurable, refusing to heal? Will you be like a deceptive brook to me, like a spring that dries up?**

The diagnosis? Jeremiah was suffering from a strong attack of doubt and weak faith. From his words one gets the feeling that he is frustrated and at his wits end. You know the man has troubles when he questions why he was even born or if you caught it, when a man questions the goodness of God. That’s right! Just look at that last line directed at God. **Will you be like a deceptive brook to me, like a spring that dries up?** Fact is, Jeremiah has faith problems and Jeremiah’s problems have led him to sin.

What about us? Could we have problems of doubt and weak faith like Jeremiah? Have there been times in your life when you were tired of the way things were or are going? Times, when because of the numerous things happening, you thought, “Why me God?” Perhaps you even wondered if God is paying attention or cares! You have found that this world with its sinful bent has piled up on you and the stress is great. You just want to cry and you feel quite alone. Well then, you are in Jeremiah’s sandals. The sandals of the sinner who has forgotten the wonder and marvel of God. Please, just listen to what the Lord says to Jeremiah.

**“This is what the Lord says; “if you repent, I will take you back, so that you may stand before me. If you say what is valuable, and not what is worthless, you will be my spokesman.”** Note that the first thing God does is point out to Jeremiah that he is a little off course with his faith. God isn’t a respecter of persons, his prophet has sinned and God lays down the law. The call is, “Repent!” Stop uttering worthless words! Stop acting like God doesn’t care or isn’t ready to help. What fascinates me most is the fact that Jeremiah in his words, does indicate that he knows God is the one he needs and the one who could fix this. But somehow, in that moment of weakness, Jeremiah suggests God will not help. Frankly, I don’t blame God for coming on so strong. Or does He? Is God just thundering law here or is this a gracious and wonderful call for Jeremiah to see God’s gracious goodness here? Because in truth, in these words God wonderfully shows his mercy and forgiveness to this sinner by stating rather plainly, **“I will take you back…you may stand before me…you will be my spokesman.”**

Please note that the Lord teaches his prophet two truths of essential importance. These are truths that we need to learn too. First, God does give a call to repent and that call is essential for us. It is a reminder of our need for God’s goodness. Repentance is a word that calls for us to change our mind, to see that we have drifted away from the goodness of God not that God has withdrawn it. Second, note that God, in the way he speaks, makes it clear that He gives the strength and wisdom for this repentance. God’s words, **“I will take you back”** are words that tell Jeremiah where his strength in these times of doubt comes from. God brings the sinner back. God turns us from accusing, to relying on God!

The most interesting aspect of this text is that this is God dealing with the individual sinner. This is God in a one to one situation with Jeremiah. And dear people, you need to grasp that this could be you or this could be me!

God’s way isn’t to strike us down with a lightning bolt. God doesn’t just step forward because of your sin and POW you are damned! No, God is gentle and merciful. God cares for us and lovingly call us back to his path of faith. God calls us to the path of repentance and restoration. Now it is true, God does tell us that there is an eternal judgment coming if we continue to reject him, but Dear people, that is not about one sin or one moment of weakness, that judgment comes after a lifetime of rejecting God. As God dealt with Jeremiah, dealt with compassion and understanding, with love and mercy, so we can be assured that God will deal with us. Not instant damnation but love and patience to come around and see his grace.

I hope you noticed when you heard this text that God didn’t just stop there. God not only called Jeremiah to repent and provided that strength to repent but notice God also promises that he will restore Jeremiah. Listen to these words of comfort and assurance. “**I will make you a bronze wall to this people. They will fight against you, but they will not overcome you, because I am with you to save you and to rescue you, declares the Lord. I will rescue you from the hand of the wicked, and I will deliver you from the grasp of the violent.”**

Jeremiah had been led to sin by the fears that our own flesh and blood can heap upon us. In dealing with this sinner God also dealt with the fears that he had. Jeremiah thought he couldn’t take the laughing and scorn of the people any longer. But God tells him, **“I will make you a bronze wall.”** Jeremiah was afraid of what the people around him might do to him. But God tells him, **“They will not overcome you, because I am with you to save you and to rescue you.”** God not only picked Jeremiah up when he fell, He went to the trouble of brushing him off and renewing his strength.

Dear believers: while the causes of Jeremiah’s troubles are different from the troubles that might afflict us, be assured that these words of strength are for our use too. There was Jeremiah the sinner…here we are sinners. There was God’s comfort and strengthening of Jeremiah, here too is our comfort and strength. I am telling you that God’s words here to Jeremiah are words to us too: **“I am with you to save you and to rescue you.”**

It is when you take a close look at those words that you realize that God has not changed through the centuries and years. I am with you to save you and to rescue you still applies today. First, just consider what God has done for us in Jesus. We were lost and condemned, enemies of God and dead in sin. But God’s Son Jesus came to be our atoning sacrifice and to change everything in our hearts! That is the marvel of the redemption of Jesus. He did it all. He became lost and condemned, he suffered the wrath of His Father, paying the price for the sins of the entire world. Jesus took our guilt, our weaknesses, our fears, and our doubts and truly died in sin. All of this took place just for the souls of God’s children. And then came the resurrection of Jesus. Because Jesus came back to life, we can grasp the entire truth of God’s love. Everything in every way that God has done has been for our salvation. He sent his Son, the resurrection proves that. He has overcome and rescues, yes, Jesus is our Savior from sin. Salvation means there is nothing to fear or doubt because God has kept his promises. Jesus gives us that. That’s what faith is about. Grasping this awesome grace and mercy of God that brought Jesus our Savior from sin. Jesus is the ultimate deliverance but note it is still the same deliverance that Jeremiah was blessed with too.

Please note that Jesus even made sure that we understood this promise of God to Jeremiah is true for us. In Matthew 28:20 Jesus tells us: **“And surely I am with you always until the end of the age.”** In the Gospel of John we have the words of Jesus concerning his sheep, **“My sheep hear my voice. I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all. No one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.”** Seriously, I could go on and on with such passages. Fact is, our comfort and strength is found in the fact God has sent Jesus to be our Savior and that in Jesus God is still helping us through our spiritual and our earthly troubles.

So what do we learn from this history of Jeremiah. Yes, the world will attack you. Yes, the world will ridicule and scorn your faith in God and Jesus. Yes, because of these difficulties and so many other realities of this sinful world you are a sinner. What is God’s way with a sinner? God’s way is a way of grace, mercy and forgiveness to those who hear and believe his Word. Think of how God worked with Jeremiah to restore, comfort and strengthen. God will do the same for you in Jesus. Yes, God’s grace, mercy and forgiveness is for us too. Given and made all the more clear by Jesus. Amen.