

“Fire!” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Pentecost 10 – August 14, 2022

- I. **Jeremiah 23:29** – “Is not My word like fire, declares the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?”
- II. **Remember the days when smoking cigarettes was a good thing?**
 - a. Many of us remember the days when people smoked everywhere – the grocery store, the movie theater, airplanes, and restaurants.
 - b. Smoking was even considered safe as people were led to believe that it was just a harmless habit... even when they had doubts because of cancer and health problems showing up.
 - c. So, in the 1930’s through the 1950’s cigarette companies would even advertise using the influence and credibility of doctors.
 - i. I know we scoff at the thought of doctors recommending smoking today, but that was a way for these companies to make people feel better about smoking and its effects on health.
 - ii. Maybe you’ve even seen the old television commercial where a doctor is smoking and says that more doctors smoke x brand of cigarettes than any other... as our jaws drop in disbelief.
 - iii. Now, most doctors didn’t outright promote smoking, but way too many were silent on the dangers.
 - iv. So, any time an “expert” talks about something, many people will listen and believe what they say.
 - d. 600 years before Jesus was born, the nation of Judah was struggling with a bunch of “experts” were who blowing smoke rather than teaching truth.
 - i. In the first verse of our reading God says don’t listen to these experts or spokespeople “filling you with vain hopes.”
 1. It’s funny, but the words vain hopes can also mean vapor or breath... so, don’t listen or be filled with their vapor... or maybe we could say the smoke they are blowing out.
 - e. Jeremiah is a prophet who was called to bring the people of Judah to repentance after centuries of rejecting God’s Word.
 - i. We studied all the kings and history leading up to this point in the Old Testament books of Samuel and Kings.
 - ii. But Jeremiah is crying out with a warning in the last days of the kingdom that God had blessed for 500 years.
 - iii. The leaders and religious experts had gone so far off track that judgment was coming to Jerusalem and the temple of God in the form of the Babylonian empire.
 - iv. The very temple of the one true God, built by King Solomon and where God chose to be present for His people was being used for pagan worship, idolatry and even temple prostitution.

- v. At the beginning of this chapter 23, God calls out the religious leaders and prophets for leading people astray – causing them to believe they are just fine in their sinful practices and lives.

III. **Does all this sound familiar?**

- a. In today's religious landscape – the voices are many – the “experts” are everywhere.
 - i. Some will say that we can do anything as long as love is involved.
 - ii. Others preach that the taking of innocent life is a matter of choice.
 - iii. Many teach that our effort and works for God are how He saves us.
 - iv. Still others claim that the Bible is not the inspired and true Word of God, but a bunch of stories made up to control people.
 - v. Even some so-called pastors teach that Jesus was not truly God and did not rise from the dead – a direct contradiction of the Christian faith
- b. As God's people who believe the Bible, and that His Word is the authority for our faith and life, we must know His Word and stand for the truth.
 - i. A couple of weeks ago I handed out a guide to various apps, podcasts, and Bible reading plans – to encourage people to learn more about the Word and God's will for our lives.
 - ii. The less we spend time in the Word, the more opportunity satan has to twist the truth.
 - iii. He's like the cigarette companies getting doctors to promote a product that is lethal...
 - 1. Pastors are preaching that sinful behavior is acceptable, and because the “expert” says so... we go on thinking that all is well
- c. So what's the big deal with that?
 - i. So we hear some guy tell us that everything is fine – just keep doing whatever you want... God loves everyone anyway...
 - ii. In the meantime, God is angry at the sin that is not being cast off as it says in our Hebrews 12 reading – but is allowed to take root... and without repentance is deadly.

IV. **What do you hear from me as your shepherd?**

- a. God will judge me with a greater measure of strictness (James 3:1) than others...
 - i. In fact, God tells the prophet Ezekiel, “If I [the LORD] warn the wicked, saying, ‘You are under the penalty of death [for your wicked deeds and lifestyle]’ but you fail to deliver the warning, they will die in their sins. And I will hold you responsible for their deaths.” (Ezek 3:18).
 - ii. So what am I supposed to do as a called and ordained servant of the Word?
 - 1. Should I be worried about what others think of me, or what God commands me to do?

2. Paul basically says in Galatians 1:10, “If I am a people pleaser, then I am not a servant of Christ.”

b. The problem is that sin is insidious... it’s deadly serious... and God hates it.

c. We have this habit of listening to people around us, or maybe even experts to our own peril...

i. We hear that sexual activity and living together without being married is normal – but God says this is fornication – it is sin.

ii. We hear that women can make a choice to abort – but God says that innocent life is not ours to take.

iii. We hear that love is love – who are we to judge – but again God holds up the relationship between a man and woman as the foundation of families.

iv. We hear that there are many ways to heaven, and Jesus says, “No one comes to the Father except through Me.” (John 14:6)

v. We hear that the Bible is full of errors and made up by sinful people – but God says in 2 Timothy 3:16 that, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, and in 2 Peter 1:20-21 that, “...No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

d. The Word of God is absolutely true... and the Word of God convicts us.

i. Why? Because living in sin without repenting is dangerous business – Hebrews 10:26 says that when we go on sinning deliberately after hearing the truth, then we reject the sacrifice of Jesus!

V. **Don’t be deceived, sin is deadly serious – just ask Jesus.**

a. God hates sin so much – hates the rebellion and brokenness so much – that He sent His only Son to save us from what it means – death... an eternal separation from the love and presence of God.

b. Jesus became the flash point for God’s wrath, as all the sin and evil that infect the world were placed on Him as He suffered, was crucified, and died

c. By His death He paid for even the worst offenses that we are guilty of.

d. In a great exchange, Jesus takes our sins and gives us forgiveness, life, and salvation.

e. Just like those Israelites of old, God calls us to repentance... or to turn our will and our lives over to His care – to turn to Him and come back home.

f. Yes, sin may be a part of the present reality... we may be in situations that are not easy to figure out what to do by God’s standards... but He wants us more than anything else to turn to Him for that pure forgiveness and grace.

VI. **God’s Word is like a fire that burns in our hearts to live for Him.**

a. The word, fire, has different meanings –

- i. On the one hand, it can be an alarm that immediately gets our attention.
 - ii. On the other hand, it can be the power of the Holy Spirit that claims us and gives us the knowledge of our salvation.
- b. As God lights a fire in our hearts by the power of His great love... turn to the source of that fire – the Word and Christ’s work to redeem us.
- c. Again, go to the source for yourself – you don’t have to listen to me as the expert – Go to His Word... it will give you the all the truth you can imagine – “looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.” (Heb 12:2)
Amen.