

Trouble Right Here
Jeremiah 23:16-29

In The Music Man Harold, the traveling salesman, has to create a need for his product. In order to create a need, he creates a problem. His eyes fall on the pool hall, and he begins to sing. I thought about playing the whole song for you, but it's 5 minutes long.

The last stanza of his song goes like this:

One fine night, they leave the pool hall,
Headin' for the dance at the Armory!
Libertine men and Scarlet women!
And Rag-time, shameless music
That'll grab your son and your daughter
With the arms of a jungle animal instinct!
Friends, the idle brain is the devil's playground!

The people in the crowd respond in song:

Trouble, oh we got trouble,
Right here in River City! With a capital "T"
That rhymes with "P" And that stands for Pool.
We've surely got trouble! Right here in River City,
Right here! Gotta figure out a way
To keep the young ones moral after school!
Trouble, trouble, trouble, trouble, trouble...

Jeremiah has been preaching trouble, trouble, trouble for twenty plus chapters, and the people of Judah have been fooled just as easily as the people in River City.

The trouble in River City has been fabricated. The trouble in Judah is real. The sins of God's people had been piling up. The time of God's judgment against that sin is at the door,

proclaimed Jeremiah. The only way to avert it was for the people to return to the Lord their God in repentance.

The people of Judah, like Israel before them, had turned to idolatry. They worshiped false gods. Like an unfaithful bride, they turned away from their first love and gave their hearts to another. Their husband, the one true God was hurt and angered. He was very willing to welcome them back, but if they did not return there would be judgment. God would undo all that He had done for them since the day He brought them out of Egypt.

There was real trouble. If the people did not repent, Jeremiah warned, God would send the Babylonian army to kill and destroy and carry off into captivity any who managed to survive the attack.

The people listened, but not to Jeremiah. Like the people in River City, they were drawn in by the words of slick talking salesmen. They were fooled by false prophets who told the people what they wanted to hear. The false prophets were proclaiming that everything was going to be fine. There's no trouble. The crops are good. The economy is good. Everything is fine. There's no need to worry. You just keep on doing what you're doing. Everything will be okay.

The people liked that message. God didn't. It was a lie. And what was worse is that they were presenting it as the word of the Lord. *Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD. They say continually to those who despise the word of the Lord, 'it shall be well with you'; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, 'No*

disaster shall come upon you.’ ... I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, ‘I have dreamed, I have dreamed!’ How long shall there be lies in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart, who think to make my people forget my name by their dreams that they tell one another, even as their fathers forgot my name for Baal? Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let him who has my word speak my word faithfully.”

Jeremiah spoke God’s word faithfully. The people did not listen and turn to the Lord in repentance. Judgment came in the form of the Babylonians who did kill, destroy, and drag away the survivors.

Do you want dreams, or the word of the Lord?

The Universalist Church proclaims, “Don’t you worry! God is a loving God. He wouldn’t send anyone to hell.”

The world says, “There’s no God. There’s no judgment. This life is all there is. Make the most of it. Live it up! Have as much fun as you can!

The devil says, “Your sins aren’t that bad. You haven’t killed anyone. Just do the best that you can, and you will be fine. What more could God expect from you?

What does God demand? Perfection. Jesus says in Matthew 5: *You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect* (v. 48). If you fall short of that you are in big trouble: *The soul who sins shall die* (Ezekiel 18:20).

Which message is more pleasant to hear? ... Which message is true?

Sin must be punished. As a just God, that is what He demands. As a loving God, He sent His Son into the world to take the punishment for you. The perfection we cannot attain Jesus accomplished for us. Speaking of Him, the writer of Hebrews states, *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.* (4:15) Jesus lived the perfect life God demands in your place.

St. Paul records the word of the Lord in 2 Corinthians: *For our sake he made him [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God* (5:21). Jesus, who did not sin, took our sin upon Himself so the heavenly Father sees us as perfect.

What is our response? Repentance – turning to God in faith – acknowledging our sin and receiving forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

We respond in worship – not despising His word but gladly hearing and learning it.

We respond in thanksgiving that we have such a loving God who searches diligently for us like a shepherd seeks out a lost sheep. He yearns to have us return to Him, and rejoices when we do because trouble has been averted. We are forgiven all our sins and promised a place with Him in life everlasting.

Is there trouble right here in Manchester/Delaware? Yes, there is. Our idolatry of not putting God first in our lives is no small thing. Our sin is a big problem. But we have a bigger Savior. God our Father sent His Son, Jesus, to die for our sins, and raised Him back to life to assure us that we, too, will rise to live eternally with Him. Amen.