

War and Peace (Jer 28:5-9; Mat 10:34-42)

* Thinking over the mystery of the Word of God, we acknowledge it as the unshakable foundation for our faith. Those who build their house of faith upon it are guaranteed from the deadly outcome of “natural disasters,” (Mat 7:27). If going into this statement thoroughly, we discover the next statement; that is to say, when the Word of God is properly understood and believed, it discloses the true meaning of the outgoing events; that helps people to endure their spiritual journey with patience and constancy—without complaining, fainting, or blaspheming. On the other hand, if somehow God’s message is perverted, it causes wrong belief and wrong behavior. The next statement to this is that in this situation people cannot get the right understanding of why things are the way they are, and it may cause people’s frustration and depression. In figurative language we conclude that the Word of God is the solid and reliable rock to be used for good purposes. At the same time, the Word of God looks like the mighty stone; if someone falls on this stone, its outcome is deadly; and when this stone falls on anyone, that one is done for ever, (Mat 21:44).

* It was noted that the plant-eating animals don’t eat the poisonous grasses under any condition. But people are not like that. In their majority, they open their doors and their hearts to false prophets, who hide the hook of falsehood with a good hearing works, (2 Tim. 3:5). This statement receives its confirmation through many passages in the Scripture including Jeremiah 28, a basis for our Sunday reading. The chapter narrates the episode of the false prophecy pronounced by Hananiah. He prophesied in Jerusalem in 597 BC, in the first year of reign the king Zedekiah. He spoke the words as they would come to him from God, (v.2).

"Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon in two years. Then he said that the king, the people, and the vessels of the temple would be brought back to Jerusalem. However, it was not quite what Jeremiah prophesied. He stated that the key event would be the collapse of the city by the power of Babylon and that Judah would be led into exile until 70 years passed; only after that would God’s people come to their homeland and prosper. On hearing both prophets, the listeners had asked, who is right, the pacifist Hananiah, or “the troublemaker” Jeremiah?

* Actually, people prefer to believe news they like the most, especially if a message was sounded with confidence on their hearing, and it was exhibited effectively as Hananiah did. He prophesied very articulately, (v.10); he took off the yoke-bars from the neck of Jeremiah and broke them in pieces; by this symbolic act he wanted to prove that the power of Babylon would certainly break.

* It doesn’t surprise us that people followed Hananiah; but Jeremiah, we guess, again was beaten, and disqualified from his prophetic office. Because Hananiah came into conflict with the true Word of God, it fell on him as a sword. Soon God sent a message to Hananiah through Jeremiah, ... *thus says the LORD:*

'Behold, I will remove you (Hananiah) from the face of the earth. This year he shall die, because he has uttered rebellion against the LORD.'" In that same year, in the seventh month, the false prophet Hananiah died according to God's word proclaimed by Jeremiah, (vv.16, 17). Nine years later the Word of God came upon the city and upon the unrepentant people as a sword. By the hand of the King of Babylon the city and the beautiful temple were ruined, and many Jews were deported from their homeland. The result of rejecting God's words caused them a lot of frustrations and depressions, if not mention that many were put to death by a sword.

* Significantly, as we read the gospel lesson of this day, (Mat 10;34-42), we note that Jesus appears not as a peacemaker liked by many people, but as a warrior with a sword in his hand. It may surprise the modern pacifists with these harsh words, but they cannot throw a word out of a song. *"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace but a sword, (v.34).*

* Meanwhile the meaning of a symbolic sword stands for the two imageries - the Word of God (Eph 6:17), and a war that is an antonym for peace, (v.34). It works accordingly, piercing and dividing apart of souls and spirit (Heb 4:12), as well as the war among the members of one's household, (v.35). It happens every time when people reject the witness of the Holy Spirit in favor of their own preferences in belief. God's Word separates such people from true confessors, and it causes a war within one community or even country. For I have come to set *a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and a man's enemies will be the members of his household, said Jesus, (vv.35,36).*

* As we look for the confirmation of this statement in the OT, we find one from the life of Gideon, (Jud 6). Gideon's career as a judge began with his rejection by the members of his father's house. It says that God commanded Gideon to destroy his father's altar to Baal; next, to build the new one to the Lord, and then to sacrifice the bull to the Lord. With the help of the ten servants, Gideon did it by the following night. In the morning, when the townspeople discovered what had happened, they looked for the group who did it, and they found Gideon as a troublemaker. On this occasion, they demanded the death penalty for Gideon saying, *"Bring out your son, that he may die, for he has broken down the altar of Baal and cut down the Asherah beside it."* (Jud 6:30)

* The outline of this story echoes the new testament era where the whole life of Jesus' followers is presented as a conflict that ends in a separation. When Matthew was mastering the Gospel, there was a war within the Jewish religious household. Thus, the Judeo-Christians were excluded from their native communities. Some of them were dragged from their house churches and put in prison, (Act 8:3). Some were stoned like Stephen and James, (Act 7:60; 12:2); or put to death by sword like Paul;

or crucified like Peter; or even torn into pieces by the wild animals like Ignatius. In the meantime, some oppressors were the very devotional Judaists and Christians. They thought that they understood the Word of God like the old catholic woman who brought a small amount of brushwood to the stack prepared for the burning of Jan Hus, a reformer of Bohemian Church; or like orthodox Jews who stoned Stephen. There are many options to say why those people acted against the servants of the Word, but we are certain about one - those people have not known God in Christ Jesus, and the consequences of their blindness are frustrations and depressions.

* Many historical evidences and our life in Christ confirm the validity of Jesus' saying, *I did not come to bring peace but a sword*. Those who understood the Word of God correctly and took it by heart appeared among the rejected, persecuted, and even beaten, stoned, crucified By the way, the executioners will also appear before the judgment seat of God, and they will be judged according to their deeds! (Rev 20:12).

* It doesn't surprise us again that the message of peaceful and prospering life is preached and believed as it was in time of Jeremiah. "Amen! May the Lord do so! May the Lord fulfill the blessings preached today by many pastors and evangelists! At the same time, there are some preachers who prophecy wars and global disasters at first hand. Therefore, the listeners might ask, whom should we believe, those who preach peace and prosperity to this world, or who preach a Sword in exchange for disobedience? Well, Jesus doesn't want us to be deceived regarding wars and calamities; these misfortunes certainly will happen as they have many times in the past. But the purpose of Jesus coming is that all people are to be saved and to come to the full knowledge of the Word of God, (1Ti 2:4).

* As we read today, Jesus doesn't hide the cost of being his disciple. On the one hand, it cost nothing but the forgiveness of sins and everlasting life. On the other hand, Christ demands his disciples to empty their hearts for him alone; otherwise, they would not be able to take their crosses and follow Jesus, even to death, (Mat 10:38,39). Please note, all these blessings will become real for us only after a personal commitment to Jesus Christ, (Joh 8:31).

* In the end, we are posing a question you are not supposed to answer, *Dear Christians, what do you wish, shall Jesus come to you with a sword, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?* As people who receive the full knowledge regarding "Peace and War," we may wish one mind and mouth to glorify God with hole church of Christ, Amen! *Come, Lord Jesus!* (Rev 22:20).

Beloved, grace and peace to you from the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Amen.