

Jeremiah 23:23-29

August 26, 2007 – 13th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Run, but don't Hide!

☛ **God is everywhere.** (vv.23,24)

△ **God is all there is.** (vv.25-29)

In the name of Jesus, who truly is “*the LORD our Righteousness*,” dear fellow redeemed:

“You can run, but you can't hide.” That's what American presidents have been telling terrorists for decades. None of them believe until bombs or soldiers with rifles bring the battle to their homes. No one wants to believe warnings that cost power or money. We're still hearing stories of engineers and architects planning the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City. Decision makers did not want to pay the high cost of insulating all that steel that stretched those skyscrapers to the great blue. And they certainly did not want to use asbestos because someone might inhale the fibers someday. Besides, they were convinced that no fire could ever burn that hot. That chances of a plane flying into such a tall building were next to nothing. In short, 9/11 could never happen.

“You can run, but you can't hide,” does mean something when God says it. How far did Adam get when he tried to run and hide in the Garden after his sin? But now that God has caught up with us and shown us our Savior from sin, He tells us, **Run, but don't Hide!** First of all, consider that...

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If you read the fifty-two chapters of Jeremiah in the Old Testament, you can see how hard religious authorities were working to hide the truth from God's people. Like all the LORD's faithful prophets, Jeremiah stood alone. Everyone hated Jeremiah. Government and religious officials conspired to kill him, threw him into a muddy cistern to die, and made the rest of his life miserable. And why? Two little Hebrew words used five times in our text: נאם-יהוה (*naom Adonai*) – literally, *declaration of the LORD*. Jeremiah preached what the LORD told him including unpopular subjects like the destruction of Jerusalem and her temple, impending captivity in Babylon. For this Jeremiah seemed to be a traitor.

Could he have left Jerusalem to minister somewhere more popular? Maybe out in the desert he could prophesy peace along with all the other prophets who always seemed to have more than enough fine clothes to cover their well fed bodies. Many people really thought the LORD's influence was confined to the temple in Jerusalem. In word and action they said something like, “Go somewhere else and say what we want. The LORD doesn't really care anyway.”

But through Jeremiah the LORD asked some probing questions: “*Am I only a God nearby,*” (נאם-יהוה) *declares the LORD, “and not a God far away? Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?” declares the LORD. “Do not I fill heaven and earth?” declares the LORD.*

For all who *by faith...understand* (Hebrews 11:3) that *in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth* (Genesis 1:1), it should be obvious that the Creator God still fills His creation beyond the farthest stars and deep in the tiniest molecule. There are no *secret places* behind closed doors in the White House, in the pastor's study, in the pulpit or out in the forest. **God is everywhere.** In spite of what our feeble senses tell us, God is both magnificent beyond our reach and yet abiding near and dear to us. “*For this is what the high and lofty One says – he who lives forever, whose name is holy: ‘I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.’*” (Isaiah 57:15 NIV)

All who trust in Jesus can see Him with the eyes of faith, ever helpful, ever near. We do not want to hide from God or try to hide our sins from Him either. He has already washed away our guilt with His

holy precious blood. When you've paid off your car or your mortgage on your house, the paper no longer threatens you. It's such a cause for celebration that sometimes churches will burn their mortgage paper when land and buildings are finally paid off. Christ paid our debt in full with His own perfect life and innocent death. Now it's time to celebrate His grace by running to do His will. **Run, but don't Hide!** As the old English translators put it, ***"I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart."*** (Psalm 119:32 KJV) And all the more because....

△ **God is all there is. (vv.25-29)**

The first time I heard this expression was from the elder Professor Wendland teaching at our Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary shortly after his return from central Africa. "God is all there is." Think about that when every hope and dream seems to crumble in the dust. When every friend you thought you had seems to vanish with the morning mist. When income fails and health goes down the drain, think about what God told Abraham in our Old Testament Lesson last Sunday: ***"I am your shield, your very great reward."*** (Genesis 15:1 NIV) Abraham had every human reason to be afraid since he had just been forced to call out his own personal army to rescue nephew Lot from four victorious kings a long way away. Could he really be safe in the Promised Land where he was only a stranger and still did not even own enough land to bury his dead? ***"I am your shield, your very great reward,"*** is a great reminder that **God is all there is.** And the Jews of Jeremiah's day really needed to know that.

Try putting yourself in Jeremiah's sandals for a minute. God keeps telling you that His own chosen city of Jerusalem will be destroyed, the very city where He chose to put His Name in Solomon's magnificent Temple, which, by the way, would also be sacked and burned. You try to stay quiet knowing very well what people will do if you tell them such things. But it's no use. As Jeremiah described it so graphically, ***"But if I say, 'I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,' his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot."*** (Jeremiah 20:9 NIV) Holding it in only made the prophet sick. He had to let it out.

But all the other prophets were having designer dreams. They kept competing with each other for the most fantastic way to tell the Jewish kings and their army that help would arrive from Egypt to drive the Babylonian conquerors back away to the north. What could Jeremiah do when his message was just the opposite and sounded so traitorous by human standards?

The same Word of God that caused him so much trouble was the powerful motivator for the beleaguered prophet. The LORD wanted everyone to know that in spite of the fact that they refused to listen to Him, He was certainly listening to them: ***"I have heard what the prophets say who prophesy lies in my name. They say, 'I had a dream! I had a dream!' How long will this continue in the hearts of these lying prophets, who prophesy the delusions of their own minds? They think the dreams they tell one another will make my people forget my name, just as their fathers forgot my name through Baal worship."*** Baal was an ancient fertility god, worshiped in orgies of gross sexuality intended to arouse Baal and his consort Ashtoreth for humans, herds and crops to flourish. Our modern obsession with sex shows how little has changed in human hearts in spite of all God's punishment on sex outside of marriage. Only in Christ can normal people find the self control that delivers from the deadly sins of the flesh. And only in Christ could prophets like Jeremiah find the courage to keep speaking out against wickedness in high places and putrid sins in the cesspools of society.

So the Lord continues to declare through Jeremiah, taunting the false prophets and encouraging His faithful preachers: ***"Let the prophet who has a dream tell his dream, but let the one who has my word speak it faithfully. For what has straw to do with grain?" declares the Lord. "Is not my word like fire," declares the Lord, "and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?"*** The Day of reckoning would come like a fire in a dry stubble field or a hammer that shatters a rock, when workmen need goggles. But come the Judgment Day, no goggle or fire extinguishers will be of any use. Only the LORD can shield us on that Day.

That's ultimately why **God is all there is**. Still today there are "the preachers who preach the lie..." because embedded in every false teaching is *the lie* that man can somehow contribute at least something to make his relationship right with God. Yet "***all our righteous acts are like filthy rags***" (Isaiah 64:6), since we are "***sinful from the time [our] mother conceived [us]***" (Psalm 51:5), and by nature "***dead in [our] transgressions and sins***." (Ephesians 2:1) The damage of what Americans today call "spirituality," personal religion without God's Word or command or promise – the damage is clear. Falsehood discourages believers, and hardens unbelievers in their unrepentant sin. (cf. Ezekiel 13:22f) We need God to reconcile us if we are ever to know true peace.

God guards us from *the lie* with the true and faithful preaching of His holy, inspired and inerrant Word. Listen carefully and see how the LORD's Christ holds *steady* as a rock along the seashore against the crashing waves. He is as *reliable* as daylight every morning. In His powerful hands is *security* no one can breach, *permanence* that will not decay, *continuance* that stretches both directions into eternity. His *fidelity* is unmatched by the most high tech sound system. His *truth* is absolute. When He says, "I love you," He proves it, even at the cost of His own shed blood and innocent life. He is absolutely *faithful* in keeping all His promises, right down to the last painful, self-sacrificing detail.

Knowing God as "faithful," you can understand and feel in your heart of hearts that **God is all there is**. It's not a fright, but a blessing to know that **God is everywhere**. Who would want to **Hide** from such a kind and loving God? But we surely do want to **Run** the way of His commandments. Focused close on Jesus we find all we need day by day. Surely in Him, the best is yet to be – in heaven eternally. Amen.