

Proclaim Grace to the Guilty

✦ **One Way out** (vv.1-3)

✦ **High stakes in** (vv.4-6)

In the Name of the LORD's Messiah, Jesus Christ, you are dearly redeemed fellow servants of God:

By this time next week we will know the outcome of the election. By God's grace elections are still blessed with words rather than bloodshed. In the time of our text wickedness was rampant in God's chosen nation of Israel much like America today. Witchcraft and spiritism, violence and immorality dominated culture, as in our movies and music. Shedding innocent blood does happen in America's abortion clinics. Folks claiming to be God's people then and now will not listen to God's Word but choose open rebellion instead. King Jehoiakim was one of the worst. Three years after his eleven-year reign began, Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon attacked Jerusalem and carried into exile Jehoiakim and prominent families, including four young men. Remember Daniel and his three friends: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? Our text was one of the LORD's last efforts to spare this wicked king and the God-fearing young men. As then, so now, the LORD wants us to **Proclaim Grace to the Guilty**.

✦ **One Way out** (vv.1-3)

"Pastor, did you mean to say that? **Proclaim Grace to the Guilty**? Surely King Jehoiakim was guilty, but Daniel and his friends?"

Jehoiakim was a wicked ruler. His heart was "*set only on dishonest gain, on shedding innocent blood and on oppression and extortion.*" (22:17 NIV84) This is the king who burned up the scroll of Jeremiah, one whole Bible book, then ordered his men to hunt down the prophet and his scribe. "The king's conduct is all the more evil in view of the fact that his primary task as Israel's king was to keep her citizens loyal to Jehovah, their Savior-God."¹ God was commanding Jeremiah to **Proclaim Grace to the Guilty**: "*Stand in the courtyard of the LORD's house and speak to all the people of the towns of Judah who come to worship in the house of the LORD. Tell them everything I command you; do not omit a word. Perhaps they will listen and each will turn from his evil way. Then I will relent and not bring on them the disaster I was planning because of the evil they have done.*" Can you sense the heart of God sincerely wanting His people find the **One Way out**? Can you relate to this?

Have you ever watched a movie or read a book that would embarrass you if you could see Jesus who is always with you? Ever spoken or written words you wish you could take back? Ever failed in your Christian duty as a parent or child, student or teacher, manager or worker, lay member or church leader? Then you understand why Daniel later confessed in his classic prayer about the sins of his nation: "*O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands....*" In His heart of hearts God had already forgiven the sins of Daniel and the whole world in view of the coming Christ. (Romans 3:25f) God's forgiving love in Christ makes us obedient and honest to confess with Daniel "*We have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.*" (Daniel 9:4-6) We all are guilty: "*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*" (Romans 3:23f) Confess your guilt to God and you will find God is overflowing with grace and mercy to forgive you.

¹ Jeske, J. C. (1985). *Daniel* (pp. 12-13). Milwaukee, Wis.: Northwestern Pub. House.

God's Word is not like clipping coupons or cropping photos to keep only what you want and throw away the rest. That's as nutritious to your soul as eating paper coupons for dinner, ketchup or not!

What's killing America today begins in her churches, not only what *is* being said, but the *silence*. Many seminary professors train pastors to deny or at least ignore the Trinity, the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, and all miraculous power-works of God in the Bible. Many Americans gladly pay salaries of all who say "***what their itching ears want to hear.***" (2 Timothy 4:3) And if you think you're really any different by nature, just wait until one of your pastors or a synod official or fellow Christian admonishes you. A wife is angry at her husband, and her pastor has to remind her God says to respect your husband: *That does it; now she's done with church.* Husband, love your wife as Christ loved the church – which means especially those times when she's obviously a sinner like you: "*Too much to ask; I'm out-a here.*" Christian, don't rob God of tithes and offerings. Be as generous to God as He's been with you: "*Oh, the church is always talking about money; I work too hard for mine.*" Suddenly, no matter what your sinful nature's objection, you can't see the **One Way out**. Satan smiles at wickedness in high places and the lowly swamplands of America. We prove how quick we are to bypass the **One Way out**.

✦ **High stakes in (vv.4-6)**

My sinful nature does not like correction any better than yours. So this really amazes me about the God of the Bible. God does not give up on me either. He keeps sending His messengers – fellow pastors and officials; men and women, sometimes kids – to remind me of God's Word. God keeps calling us to repentance. His kindness calls each of us to turn from our sinful ways in repentant faith, listening to God's Word, then working in faith-born love to put it into practice. "***For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men.***" (Lamentations 3:33) Isaiah calls this God's "***strange work... his alien task.***" (28:21) He corrects our sin and disciplines us in order to bless us with grace and peace.

"Say to them, 'This is what the LORD says: If you do not listen to me and follow my law, which I have set before you, and if you do not listen to the words of my servants the prophets, whom I have sent to you again and again (though you have not listened), then I will make this house like Shiloh and this city an object of cursing among all the nations of the earth.'" Shiloh was the first place of worship in the Promised Land, but destroyed because of Israel's rebellion and sin.

Everyone sees high stakes in our American election, but compared to eternal souls? That's the main reason we want to save unborn babies and help their mothers and fathers too. Life is our only time of grace to come to repentant faith in Jesus, the world's one Savior. We have **High stakes in** eternity here. And God works one miracle of grace after another by sending faithful preachers of God's righteousness today just as He kept sending His prophets for centuries to His chosen, stubborn nation of Israel. He keeps us preaching even to unresponsive hearts in hopes of turning blood-bought souls back to their good and gracious Creator before the last trumpet sounds. There is still hope for America today. As repentant Christians, each of us can apply God's mercy by speaking out, speaking up, speaking clearly – God's saving message of law and gospel, sin and grace in God's one and only Son, the Savior of all.

God is like a fireman, calling from the ladder, "Climb out here! I've got you." Would you refuse? Demand that God say, "Please"? Dear heart, find your soul's satisfaction in God's free grace and favor.

The LORD's love is great; His mercies never fail. They will be new for you on election morning and all the days ahead. (Lamentations 3:22) Even when the worst happened to Daniel, his friends, and others of God's chosen people in succeeding years, God did not fail. In fact, the Holy Spirit inspired Jeremiah to write one of the Bible's most comforting passages to Jewish exiles. You'll see this on Christian art all over the world: "***I know the plans I have for you,***" declares the LORD, "***plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.***" (29:11 NIV84) If the election goes your way, let your joy be mixed with fear; Judgment Day will end all earthly joy. But let godly fear be mixed with hope; Jesus lives and rules all things for your eternal happiness. Heaven is our home. Hope in Christ secure. Amen.