

June 21, 2020 – Jeremiah 20:7-13 & Matthew 10:21-33

Jeremiah's life was not working out as he expected. Life started well for him. He was born during the reign of one of Judah's last good kings: King Josiah. And he had the privilege of watching as Josiah turned from the wickedness of his fathers and tried to bring the nation onto a godly path.

He was the son of a priest and was likely educated – both theologically and otherwise – by the best teachers of Jerusalem. When God called him to be a prophet, he was shocked that God would want someone as young as him. Which means he might have only been a teenager when he started preaching.

But the Lord had given him incredible gifts. God made Jeremiah tough. He made him, to use God's own phrase, a “wall of bronze” against anyone who tried to oppose him. God spoke directly to him. He made Jeremiah wise and insightful and passionate. He was one of the greatest prophets Israel would ever know.

And all of that made him very, very unpopular. Jeremiah's family and friends abandoned him. The people scoffed at him and rejected him from their cities. His wisdom and prophetic insight made it impossible for him to enjoy life at all. Why? Because he saw things that no one else could.

He saw their sin. The deep, overwhelming idolatry that plagued the nation. The corruption that pervaded every aspect of their lives. The injustices woven into the very fabric of their society. And the lust for power and pleasure that seemed to drive their every action.

He saw their sin and he saw God's anger. The wrath that God had held back for hundreds of years. The warning of doom and destruction that God continually made. Made, but didn't carry out, because his love and grace were so great, so enduring. And he so desperately wanted to see his people repent.

Jeremiah saw their sin, he saw God's anger, and he saw the future. He saw the coming armies of Babylon. Cutting a swath of destruction through all of Judah. Besieging Jerusalem until the people died of hunger. Carrying them away from their home and their Temple to a foreign land.

And Jeremiah knew that there was nothing that could be done to stop it. You see, the time of God's forbearance was coming to a close. Josiah's reforms would only be temporary. After he died, everything would return to the way it had been for centuries before. And then the wrath of God would be poured out. Jerusalem would be destroyed.

And all that Jeremiah could do was warn the people of what was to come. He couldn't spare them from God's physical judgement. It was too late for that. But he could at least try to turn hearts back to the Lord. Try and spare them from spiritual judgement. From eternal judgement.

But no one would listen. False prophets had assured the people that God was a supporter of their sin. That Jeremiah was just a bitter, backwards conservative, who liked to tell stories of doom and gloom. When, according to them, God had promised peace and prosperity.

And the people listened to these false prophet. They listened because they had abandoned the Lord and turned power and money and pleasure into their gods. They claimed to know the true God. But their homes and their lives were filled with idols. And they insisted – they demanded – that Jeremiah change God's Word and declare them righteous.

Sound familiar? It should. It's gotten kind of lost in the midst of the pandemic and all the racial strife in this country, but right now we're in the middle of “Pride Month”. And I kinda appreciate the LGBT leaders for using that term: pride. Pride. Sinful pride. They are proud of their sin. They consider their homosexual activities to be a source of pride for them.

Which means that homosexuality is no longer a question of equal rights before the law or passively ignoring gay couples in a sort of “live and let live” coexistence. No, the demand that the Pride Movement has made of us is that their sin must be something we approve of so much, that they can take pride in it. And if we say anything that in any way makes them ashamed of what they do, we have viciously attacked them. Because we have viciously attacked their pride in their own sin.

And so, as a result, we are hated. We are insulted. We are called bigots and homophobes and bitter, backwards conservatives. Just like all God's prophets have. Just like Jeremiah was.

*“O Lord, you have deceived me, and I was deceived; you are stronger than I, and you have prevailed.”* Jeremiah feels deceived. Deceived by God. Deceived by what he thought would be a gift. It was as if God led Jeremiah into a trap. The trap of wisdom. True wisdom. Godly wisdom. The wisdom that come from God's voice.

Because, at first glance, it seems like having wisdom would be a great thing. To know God. To know God's Word. To know God's plans. Who wouldn't want that?

And then that wisdom comes. And you see the world through God's eyes. And you see all the evil around you. And you see all the evil inside of you. And suddenly you feel deceived and weak. Because the world is so much worse than you thought it was.

So you speak out against it. And that only makes it worse. *“I have become a laughingstock all the day;”* Jeremiah says, *“Everyone mocks me. For whenever I speak, I cry out, I shout, ‘Violence and destruction!’ For the word of the Lord has become for me a reproach and a derision all day long.”*

And yet, Jeremiah tells us that not speaking isn't an option either. He can't just pretend he doesn't see how sinful this world has become. He can't just let his family and friends dance happily through the gates of hell. *“If I say, ‘I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,’ there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.”*

Jeremiah is stuck in a terrible place. We are stuck in a terrible place. If we freely speak God's Word, we are mocked. And if we refuse to speak God's Word, it comes out anyway. It burns through us like a fire in our bones. And it wears away at us until we just can't hold it back.

And so we don't hold it back. We don't even try. Number one, because there's no point. But, number two, because speaking God's Word is our purpose. It's our calling. To live without mentioning God or speaking any more in his name is to deny what it means to be a baptized child of God.

And the harsh reality is that God did not leave his people, his Church, here on earth to fit in with the multitudes. He speaks a different word than they do—a higher, ancient, eternal word that will always prove right. It's right not only because it's true but because its purpose is to save the world from its foolishness. If you love your children, spouse, friends, parents, and even your enemies, you should want them to hear and know this truth. As difficult as it is to speak.

The Lord loves his children, and that's why this word has been proclaimed in every generation. He will not let it die. He will not let it go unheard. He will not allow it to return to him empty without accomplishing the purpose for which it is sent.

Now, that doesn't mean that we'll escape all persecution. That doesn't mean that there won't be some who mock us, ridicule us, make us a laughingstock, and call us all manner of vile names. Our Gospel lesson makes that clear.

I thought it was wonderfully ironic that today – Father's Day – we would hear, *“Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death.”* Happy Father's Day!

But, unfortunately, it's true. The hardest people to talk to about God's Word can often be our own families. The most biting insults and harshest words can often be between fathers and sons. To be a disciple of Jesus Christ is to be hated by all for his name's sake. Even your own family.

Because a disciples is never above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. They called Jesus Beelzebub and crucified him on a cross. What do you think they'll do to you?

So how did Jesus do it? How did he make it through all the insults and pain? How did he face death itself and walk away alive on the other side? He did it the same way Jeremiah did, knowing that his vindication was at hand.

*“But the Lord is with me as a dread warrior; therefore my persecutors will stumble; they will not overcome me. They will be greatly shamed, for they will not succeed. Their eternal dishonor will never be forgotten.”*

Our hope is the same hope that Jeremiah had. The same hope that Jesus had. The same hope that countless generations of prophets and saints have had.

We are not alone. And the fight is not ours to win. The sin that is inside of us has been conquered by the blood of Jesus Christ. The future of death and destruction that awaited us has been erased and replaced by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And so we never speak God's Word in vain. The worst that can happen is that they mock us to the very end and then see Christ come on the clouds of glory to judge the living and the dead. And suddenly know how wrong they were.

And the best that can happen is that the Lord will do for them what he already did for us: Deliver the life of the needy from the hand of evildoers. Deliver those captive to sin and death to the grace forgiveness found in his name.

Jeremiah's life as a prophet did not work out as he expected. Maybe your life as a Christian hasn't worked out like you expected either. But don't lose hope. God has not deceived you. He has not abandoned you to the world. Have no fear of them. *“Sing to the Lord! Praise the Lord!”* For he has delivered you, and he will always be with you. Amen.