

March 13, 2022 – Jeremiah 26:8-15; Philippians 3:27-4:1; Luke 13:31-35

Nobody enjoys being told they're wrong. Particularly not from someone they trust and respect. We feel betrayed by it. In fact, in many ways, it's easy to hear the truth from someone you hate. You didn't like them in the first place. And whether they're right or wrong, you can generally refute anything they tell you and then deal with the issue personally on your own terms.

But when it's someone you love, trust, and respect who tells you something you don't want to hear, that's a different story. It's the classic, "Honey, does this dress make me look fat?" conundrum that virtually every married man faces at some point in his life. If we were complete strangers, we could say, "Absolutely. It's completely unflattering." And the worst we'd have to suffer is a slap in the face.

But as husbands, the truth becomes, "I think you look beautiful in anything, dear." Because we'll be dealing with the consequences of the truth for... a long time. We can feel betrayed over so little. But now, scale that up to something truly important. Scale that up to matters of eternal importance.

I addressed this recently at Calvary Lutheran High School. Every year, Calvary does their Witnessing Workshop, where local pastors and church workers roleplay different types of people that the students might have an opportunity to share their faith with.

And the character I was playing for this was a closet Christian. Someone who was raised as a Christian, never really lost their faith completely, but also never, ever talked about it. And the reason my character didn't talk about their faith was because they were afraid to tell their friends the truth of God's Word. Because telling them the truth meant telling them that they were wrong.

I was a tough nut for the students to crack. And I think I was especially tough because many of them struggled with the same fears. How do you tell your best friend that what they're doing is immoral? How do you tell a family member that they don't really know God? How do you tell a suffering person that they a suffering the just consequences of their sinful activity? How do you tell someone – anyone – that they are going to hell?

That was Jeremiah's message to Jerusalem in our Old Testament lesson. Jeremiah is a prophet. Possibly the most respected man in all of Israel. And he is delivering a message that is beyond hard to swallow. It's downright insulting.

And the people are ready to kill him. Not because they hated him. But because they trusted him. Because they know he's right and it is the last thing in the world they want to hear. And they'd rather kill him than listen to the truth from someone they love.

It's a pattern that God's people repeat over and over again. They did it to Jeremiah. They did it to Elijah. They did it to John the Baptist.

And they did it to Jesus. *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem... you who kill the prophets... you were not willing"* to listen. They did it to Paul. *"For many... walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things."* And they do it to us.

I can't tell you how often I have heard people tell me, "I don't go to church because I don't want to hear about all that hell and damnation stuff." Or "I stopped going to my church because they were too judgmental." Or "I don't like that church. The pastor there called my friend a sinner."

But, truthfully, you're not doing your job as a Christian if somebody isn't offended by what you say. Because we are all called to be prophets. Moses himself said it back in Numbers 11, *"Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!"*

We have had the Lord's Spirit put upon us at our Baptism. We are all called to share the Word of God, like Jeremiah did. And frankly, the Word of God is pretty offensive to an ungodly world. In fact, it can be pretty offensive to preach it to an imperfect church.

But we don't let that stop us. And it's not because we like to be judgmental. It's not because we just want to be right. It's not because we want to be haughty and arrogant and stand over our peers and sneer down at them. If that's our only reason – if that's even part of the reason – then we deserve just as much judgment as we're dishing out.

No, we do this out of care and concern. Look at what Jeremiah tells the people. They have just declared, *“You shall die... This man deserves the sentence of death!”* They want his head on a platter. But he doesn't reply in anger or revenge. He simply says: *“Reform your ways and your actions... obey the Lord your God... and the Lord will relent.”*

Jeremiah's goal is not to see these people destroyed. It's to see them saved. This is his country. These are his friends and neighbors. He doesn't want to see them die in captivity, nor does he take any pleasure in delivering this message. He's not the traitor they make him out to be. He's a hero. Because he told them the truth, even when it hurt them to hear it.

Jesus does the same thing: *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem... How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings.”* This is not the attitude of a man who enjoys being angry. Who enjoys telling people they are sinners. Who enjoys prophesying their destruction. He loves this city like they are his own children.

Look at St Paul: *“You whom I love and long for, my joy and my crown... stand firm in the Lord.”* This is not arrogance. This is not pride. This is not self-righteousness. He does not call on the Philippians to imitate him because he thinks he's better than everyone. He calls on them to imitate him because he loves them. And he wants the best for them. And he knows that by imitating him they will be better equipped to resist temptation.

Jeremiah... Paul... Jesus... These are people who honestly want to see the world change. And they were willing to suffer for it. Jeremiah was willing to be outcast from his own people on the chance that one person would repent. St Paul was willing to be locked in prison on the chance that one more person would hear the Gospel.

And Jesus Christ was willing to be nailed to a cross on the chance that even one person in this world would be saved by his blood. After all that they have suffered for the sake of the Gospel, it makes me wonder... what are willing to suffer for the sake of the Gospel?

Because the world will always see us as traitors. Traitors to humanity. Traitors to our sinful nature. Traitors to the evil powers of this world. Our god is not our own needs and desires. Our god is the one true God. Who is both just and merciful. Who punishes the wicked, but has mercy on a thousand generations. To be a disciple of Jesus Christ is to be a traitor. It is to be hated.

But to be a disciple of Jesus Christ is also to love. It's to love in the midst of hatred. It's to love like Christ. Because while we were yet sinners, Christ Jesus loved us. While we were yet traitors to God, he was loyal to us.

While we were yet insulting him. Spitting at him. Yelling that he saved others, but he can't save himself. While we were yet one of those in the crowd yelling, “Crucify! Crucify!” He was looking at us saying, “Father, forgive them. They don't know what they are doing.”

While we were yet sinners, Christ Jesus died for us. And while the world is yet sinful, we continue to love them as well. Even when they hate us. Even when they insult us. Even when they nail us to a cross.

Because our citizenship isn't on this earth. It isn't with these people who hate us for telling them the truth. It isn't in these bodies that crave sinful pleasures that lead only to destruction.

Our citizenship is in heaven. And from heaven we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus, who will transform these lowly, sinful bodies to be like his glorious body. To be like his resurrected body. In this we stand firm, no matter the cost. Amen.