**Jeremiah 26:8-15** March 17, 2019

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*Jeremiah 26:8As soon as Jeremiah finished telling all the people everything the Lord had commanded him to say, the priests, the prophets and all the people seized him and said, “You must die! 9Why do you prophesy in the Lord’s name that this house will be like Shiloh and this city will be desolate and deserted?” And all the people crowded around Jeremiah in the house of the Lord.*

*10When the officials of Judah heard about these things, they went up from the royal palace to the house of the Lord and took their places at the entrance of the New Gate of the Lord’s house. 11Then the priests and the prophets said to the officials and all the people, “This man should be sentenced to death because he has prophesied against this city. You have heard it with your own ears!” 12Then Jeremiah said to all the officials and all the people: “The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the things you have heard. 13Now reform your ways and your actions and obey the Lord your God. Then the Lord will relent and not bring the disaster he has pronounced against you. 14As for me, I am in your hands; do with me whatever you think is good and right. 15Be assured, however, that if you put me to death, you will bring the guilt of innocent blood on yourselves and on this city and on those who live in it, for in truth the Lord has sent me to you to speak all these words in your hearing.”*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**Determined to Save Those Who Don’t Want to Be Saved**

Always a scandal. The most recent one revealed this week about college admissions—well, we’ll find out if it has staying power or not. As with all good scandals, it gives most people the opportunity to get upset about the unfairness of a system gone bad, and people who care only about themselves.

A half dozen or so scandals ago, maybe you remember the uproar over high prices on certain drugs which had only one manufacturer. Since nobody else was making these life-saving medications, a couple companies—actually a few individuals in these companies—multiplied the prices several times just to soak the customers and government, and to put a few more shovel-fulls of cash into their flush bank accounts. What did they care about ethics and morality? It’s all legal.

Well, imagine something beyond this. Imagine that an epidemic has struck an entire region. People are dying by the hundreds. Somebody develops a cure, but then refuses to release it? Reporters would be at the residence. There would be protests in the streets. The 24/7 news channels would ignore every other bit of news. We could go to war and they would still only talk about this scandal. All the talking heads would lament the direction of our country. Social media would be full of clever memes. To withhold the saving hand of a cure from the dying? Who could imagine?

But here’s a twist: What if the dying don’t want the cure? What if the people are totally happy dying? “Impossible,” you say.

If you grew up in a practicing Christian house, you found out just this thing. *You* learned to love the Lord Jesus. You learned to love him as your Savior from sin. You knew that Jesus took care of you every day, that he listened to your prayers. You prayed to him at meal time and before bed. You loved Jesus. And at some point, you probably, in your simple childish way, shared this wonderful goodness of Jesus with a friend. And then it all became so complicated. Because what you knew to be so good and right and true, a benefit for now and eternity, you discovered that some people didn’t always want to hear your good news. Some, maybe many, were on the same page as you. But you found out that some, maybe many, were not. They didn’t want the cure to the epidemic of sin. And if people get short-tempered about it and even mock you, you kind of figure that, well, never mind. Suddenly, even though you have the cure to the ravages of sin, you aren’t real sure about sharing that life-saving medicine. And so you learn to go through life calculating who might *not* react well to the Christian message—because they don’t want to hear it anyway.

That was the situation facing Jeremiah. Two or three years before this, God’s people had the best spiritual leader ever: King Josiah. Josiah had ruled for 31 years, more than a generation, so there had been time for his reformation to take root. Josiah and Jeremiah were a dynamic reformation duo. But when Josiah died, it became obvious that a king can make laws, but he can’t change hearts. Most had not truly turned to the Lord.

Now it was just Jeremiah. No longer did he have a king backing him up. The new king, King Jehoiakim, was positively hostile. So when Jeremiah went into the temple courtyard to preach, to advise people about the medication that could save their souls and their nation, ***“as soon as Jeremiah finished telling all the people everything the Lord had commanded him to say, the priests, the prophets and all the people seized him and said, ‘You must die!’”***

He hadn’t gone down into the bad part of town, and got up on his milk crate in a dimly lit tavern. This was the temple! And the leaders of the mob were the priests and prophets. Not everyone who needs saving wants to be saved, not even all religious people.

Think of Lot, the nephew of Abraham, when he was living in Sodom. The Lord God sent him angels, angels!, to tell him to clear out fast, and Lot just couldn’t bring himself to do it. After pleading with him all evening and then the next morning, the angels finally grabbed Lot’s arm and dragged him out of the city. And Lot was a believer! Not everyone who needs saving wants to be saved.

The mob surrounded Jeremiah and accused him, ***“Why do you prophesy in the Lord’s name that this [temple] will be like Shiloh?”*** You might not, but these Israelites knew about Shiloh. Eight hundred years before Jeremiah, the Israelites entered and took possession of the land of Canaan. They set up the Lord’s worship center in a place called Shiloh, 20 miles north of Jerusalem. For four hundred years, all Israel went to the Lord’s tabernacle at Shiloh—400 years! Then during the corrupt high priesthood of Eli and his sons, the place was destroyed by the Philistines. And for the 400 years before Jeremiah, Shiloh was nothing but ruins. (Interesting to note that in the 1920’s a Danish archeological expedition at Shiloh corroborated this: destroyed in 1050BC it was uninhabited again until 300BC.[[1]](#footnote-1))

When Jeremiah relayed God’s message that Jerusalem and its temple will be ruins, people shouted, “Who is this traitor?” No one takes kindly to street preachers who accuse you of being so iniquitous that God will destroy your nation—no matter how true it is.

Because we know that no one wants to hear the bitter medicine of repentance, normal people don’t like to say it. Most of us don’t like making enemies. Jeremiah’s thought, however, was not, “Oh, ok. I guess since you guys don’t want to hear it, I’ll just shut up. Never mind. Carry on.” Jeremiah kept on.

Now don’t think that Jeremiah is some sort of socio-path. There are people out there who find a strange enjoyment in bearing bad news. There are those who have a martyr complex. They think that people’s rejection is a badge of honor. Jeremiah was not this sort of person. Rejection hurt him. What is it we say? He wore his emotions on his sleeve.

In the Scriptures he lamented: *“The word of the Lord has brought me insult and reproach all day long. 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”* (20:8-9). And again, *“I bear your name, O Lord God Almighty. I never sat in the company of revelers, never made merry with them; I sat alone because your hand was on me… Why is my pain unending and my wound grievous and incurable?”* (15:16-18). Pain bleeds out of Jeremiah through his words. Jeremiah was the most human of all the prophets. But he could not be quiet.

When the mob’s uproar reached the king’s palace (which wasn’t long because it was next door to the temple,) ***“the officials of Judah went up from the royal palace to the house of the Lord and took their places at the entrance of the New Gate.”*** The first impression might be that these officials have a stand-offish attitude—sitting over by the gate. But take a moment to understand another culture. In the ancient world, cities had defensive walls. They might have only a couple gates to get into the city. A city like Jerusalem might have half a dozen. Since gates were the funnel points for all traffic, lots of stuff happened at the gates. One thing was that legal cases were heard at the city gates. Legal cases were not held in shady backrooms, but in the most public places possible: the city gates. So when the officials ***“took their places at the entrance of the New Gate”***, they are setting up court for an official legal investigation.

First, the prosecution presented its evidence (certainly in abbreviated form here): ***“This man should be sentenced to death because he has prophesied against this city. You have heard it with your own ears!”***

Then the defense, Jeremiah, addresses the judges: ***“The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the things you have heard. Now reform your ways and your actions and obey the Lord your God. Then the Lord will relent and not bring the disaster he has pronounced against you.”*** Wow! Even to the officials he says, ***“Reform your ways and your actions…”*** Giving that sort of speech to the judge generally doesn’t help out your case.

But you know what? Jeremiah’s message is too special, too powerful, too potentially life-giving to save his own skin. He wants these people who don’t want to be saved, to be saved! God sent him to preach a message, and he cannot do otherwise. He courageously ends his defense: ***“As for me, I am in your hands; do with me whatever you think is good and right.”***

So, how did it all turn out? Did they listen? Was Jeremiah set free or imprisoned or put to death? You would like to know, wouldn’t you? But I’m not going to tell you, because that’s not what this word of God and this sermon is about. It isn’t about the results, it is about the message. Really, Jeremiah didn’t care about the results. He hoped and prayed that they would listen, but that wasn’t up to him. He knew that the important thing for him wasn’t the result, but that he had put the life-giving word of God in front of these people. So if you want to know what happened to Jeremiah, go home and read the rest of Jeremiah chapter 26. And if you have an hour, read all the way to chapter 43. But *I am not* going to tell you what happened to Jeremiah, because it isn’t about the results, it is about speaking the message.

So often we measure by how many people listen, how many people believe. That’s not how God measures what you do. Now, to be sure. We pray that people will listen. We try to be winsome as we present the Gospel. We are joyful, even as the angels of heaven are over every sinner who repents. But finally, what is supremely important is simply that we do what God has given us to do: to speak God’s truth. Whether people believe—that is between them and God, not you.

But I know your objection: “Jeremiah was a prophet. I’m not a prophet.” I’m glad you said that because you are exactly right. You have not been called to publicly proclaim the message. So does Jeremiah 26 apply to you?

Yes. You may not be called to speak God’s truth in the temple courtyards. But you have been called to speak in audiences of your own calling. The most important calling of all is parents to children. Children need to hear the message. And children who have been faithfully trained in the Lord as children are most likely to end up in heaven.

Grandparents, in a less direct way, have this responsibility. And spouse to spouse. And within your family, and among your friends. You may not be a prophet called to preach before crowds, but you are called to speak. You have a life-giving medicine which cannot be hoarded.

The hardest part of it all is realizing how often I myself have failed in this calling. Each time I have stifled my witness, avoided the subject, fearfully failed to mention the awkward subject of faith—each time, I have sinned. Like all others, these sins deserve God’s punishment.

How glad I am that Christ Jesus, as we heard in our Gospel reading, was more determined than we ever have been to speak the truth to those who need to hear – Jesus was more determined to go to Jerusalem to die for us. May that resolution of his to die for us, to win eternal life for us, strengthen our determination to

**Save Even Those Who Don’t Want to Be Saved.** Amen.

1. *Thompson Chain Reference Bible, Archeological Supplement, p.1831-32.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)