

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Being God’s mouthpiece is not always easy. In fact, those who speak God’s unchanging truth so often speak what is considered offensive to what people want to hear. Just look at Jeremiah. He did not want to be a prophet.

He knew what the response by the people would be when he would proclaim anything unpopular. The people would attack him and ridicule him. Just as they did to the prophets before him.

After being called by God to be His prophet, Jeremiah tried to get out of his calling, saying to God: **“Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth”** (Jeremiah 1:6). But the Lord said, **“Do not say, ‘I am only a youth’; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the Lord”** (Jeremiah 1:7-8).

Jeremiah knew the life of a prophet. It was lonely. He would face opposition and suffering. God prepared him for that. But God also gave him a promise: **“They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, declares the Lord, to deliver you”** (Jeremiah 1:19).

Jeremiah didn’t want to be God’s prophet, but he was called by God to be a prophet and he fulfilled God’s command. Like Jeremiah, at first, I didn’t want to be a pastor. I thought *those* people were different. I thought *they* were “special.” I thought, do I really want to go to church every Sunday? Then I thought, that’s what I’m practically doing already. So, God poked and prodded me in good times and bad times through the hearing of His Word and through the people God placed in my life.

Jeremiah was called by God, and despite his initial refusal, he became God’s mouthpiece. We are all called by God to live in a particular place and at a particular time. Some times appear to be easier than others.

We all like to reminisce back to the 1950s when the Church was the bedrock of society. But each time has its own challenges, including the 1950s. For Jeremiah, he knew that his time as prophet was going to be rough. He knew that as God's mouthpiece, he was going to have an uphill battle and likely losing battle before him.

First, let's get some context on what led to the calling of Jeremiah. The Southern Kingdom of Judah was embracing the worship styles of the contemporary false gods. Under King Ahaz, Judah integrated additional sacrifices, including the king sacrificing his own son as an offering. This angered God. Eventually Ahaz died, and his other son Hezekiah who was not sacrificed became king. Hezekiah was the complete opposite of his father, as he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. He listened to the Lord and tore down all the false worship his father instituted. The days were good in Judah. But then Hezekiah died, and his son Manasseh becomes king.

Manasseh brought back all the evil of his grandfather. All the evil returned and more of it. Manasseh is described as being the most wicked king ever in Judah. He, like his grandfather, sacrificed a son to false gods.

This is where we find Jeremiah the prophet. Due to the increasing evil of the kings, and their influence upon the people, Jeremiah is sent to speak of God's judgment. He becomes a man of contention. He is called to preach repentance to Judah, but the people of Judah refuse. Due to their hardness of heart and their failing to repent, God called Jeremiah to announce the destruction of Judah.

To God's pronounced judgment, the people of Judah refused to listen to Jeremiah. Instead, they lashed out at him saying, *"If it wasn't for Jeremiah and his incessant preaching of judgment, Judah would be at peace. Quit preaching and let us be!"* They believed the problem was Jeremiah, not them.

Now, every faithful preacher has met the wrath of a hearer who was offended by God's unchanging truth. And every Christian has known skepticism, the scorn, the dismissal that comes from taking a stand on some unpopular truth of God's Word.

In the year of our Lord 2023, our government permits so much evil, and permits so many activities that are contrary to God's Word, such as today's hot-button issues: elective abortion, no-fault divorce, and same-sex sexual relationships, which have been confused as being secular political issues as all result in strong opinions and strong emotions.

- On elective abortion, sticking with Jeremiah, God’s Word tells us: **“Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you”** (Jeremiah 1:5) and **“when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb”** (Luke 1:41). Here, and so many other places, God says life is precious to Him and is never a burden and that life ought to be precious to everyone.
- On no-fault divorce, Jesus says: **“Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery”** (Matthew 19:8-9). So, divorce is not to be taken lightly. God desires reconciliation, but divorce is permitted when it's the last possible action.
- On same-sex relationships, God’s Word says: **“Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator”** (Romans 1:24-25). So, same-sex sexual relationships reject God’s intention of men and women complementing each other, for mutual companionship, and procreation.

Like I said, each of those issues are hot-button issues. They each result in strong emotions. But why is that the case? This is the case, because so very often, we fall into Satan’s trap of deception. This is where Peter found himself. You see, instead of setting his mind on the things of God, he was setting his mind on the things of man. After Jesus foretold of His upcoming death and resurrection, Peter could not allow Jesus to die. Like Peter, we, too, can get caught up with our desires, while becoming intolerant to what God desires. This is our natural tendency. This is what our sinful nature desires. And what does Jesus say about that? He says all things that are not of God are of Satan. **“For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?”** (Matthew 16:26)

During Jeremiah’s time, he faced many false prophets just as we do with wolves who are disguised as pastors today. The false prophets were preaching what the people wanted to hear saying, **“God just wants you to be happy!”** But, behind that so-called friendly face of that false prophet is Satan’s deception. Outwardly, the false and genuine prophets look the same. They have the same liturgy and hymns, but the preaching and teaching is what sets them apart. Jeremiah is preaching repentance as the false prophets are saying, **“Don’t worry about it, everything will be fine!”**

Like Jeremiah's day, faithful preaching and hearing of God's Word attracts opposition and suffering, but it also delivers God's precious promise of salvation in Jesus Christ.

In our text from Jeremiah 15, the prophet is doing a lot of complaining. Jeremiah remained faithful to his calling, but his prophetic office was difficult and lonely. Nobody wanted to hear him, and if he heard any response to his preaching, he heard insults.

Jeremiah felt like a failure. His hearers did not believe him when he spoke for God. And when Jeremiah interceded on behalf of the people, God would not listen to him. Jeremiah complained that he bore reproach on account of God's Word. He was filled with indignation and sharp pain. In his despair, he even accused God of deceit and unfaithfulness saying, ***"Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed?"*** (Jeremiah 15:18)

Jeremiah was beginning to believe that his preaching was getting him nowhere. He was conflicted. He desired what we all desire: approval. He was called to be God's watchman, but he was starting to think it may be a better life if he just gave up and join those to whom he was preaching. He thought, *"Life would be so much easier if I just gave the people what they want to hear. I wouldn't hear insults, but praise."*

When he was about to give everything up, God responds to Jeremiah with a call to repentance with Gospel promises. God called him to repent of his doubt: ***"If you return, I will restore you, and you shall stand before Me"*** (Jeremiah 15:19). God gave him joy in His words for each word God spoke he inwardly digested. He said, ***"Your words were found, and I ate them"*** (Jeremiah 15:16a). To us, that may be a surprise. We would expect Jeremiah to say, *"Your words were found, and I read them, or studied them, or memorized them"* but not *"ate them."* Words are academic and intellectual. But not God's Word! God's Word is more like food than ideas – although it is both. God's Word doesn't just consist of information, teachings, precepts, and concepts. God's Word contains vitamins and calories, but of a spiritual sort. God's Word gives life – spiritual life. God's Word feeds and nourishes us.

Despite his doubts, God's Word always gave Jeremiah a sure and certain joy. Even in this instance, God's Word promised him salvation, deliverance, and redemption.

So, if you have or are experiencing doubts, if you have experienced shame for trusting in God's Word, you are not alone. You are right in line with Jeremiah the prophet.

You see, even though Jeremiah experienced so many troubles, God never gave up on him. God never took away His promises.

So, we can identify with Jeremiah, in our sins, our doubts, and our failures. We, too, are sometimes plagued with doubt and despair. As pastors and hearers, we may complain with Jeremiah to God and question His faithfulness.

Like Jeremiah, God calls us to repentance and faith. We like sheep have all gone astray. We have all been enticed by Satan. We have all given in to sinful desires. All God desires from us is repentance and faith in Him. As we come to Him seeking forgiveness, He turns us so that we are turned away from sin and unbelief and now look to Him for grace and mercy. Like Jeremiah, He promises that His Word is like a fortified city that is able to withstand the attacks of the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh. God bestows salvation, deliverance, and redemption to all who trust His Word.

In our text, you may wonder, “*Where is Jesus in all of this?*” You may recall that Jeremiah was once considered as a possible, but wrong answer to “*Who is the Son of Man?*” But Jesus and Jeremiah are much alike. They both spoke to little success. Due to the people’s unbelief, Jesus was declared a blasphemer. He was mocked for preaching the truth. Even His own disciples didn’t fully believe Him to be the Messiah until His resurrection from the dead. But through Christ’s death, He would suffer our perpetual pains and incurable wounds of our sins. He took our punishment. His blood is our full redemption price. His death is our deliverance. His resurrection is our salvation and justification.

All of us share in the sufferings of Jeremiah and of Christ as we bear His cross in our various vocations. But as we bear His cross as parent, child, employer, and employee, we are also given the same promise that He gave to Jeremiah. We are given the promise that God is the strong and fortified city, so that when we face sufferings due to the faith, we rejoice in hope, are patient in tribulation, and are constant in prayer. By grace through faith in Christ alone, we are given the sure and certain hope that despite Satan’s constant attacks, Christ is always with us as He delivers His promises of forgiveness, life and salvation through His unchanging Word and His blessed Sacraments. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

**+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +**