

Jeremiah 26:8-15  
Second Sunday in Lent  
Sermon Series: Seriously.  
Christians Face Serious Opposition

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<sup>8</sup> But 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! <sup>9</sup> Why 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.

<sup>10</sup> When 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. <sup>11</sup> Then 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!”

<sup>12</sup> Then 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. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> As for me, I am in your hands; do with me whatever you think is good and right. <sup>15</sup> Be 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.”

I don’t remember where it came from and I have no idea if it’s still around, but when I was growing up, my family had an hour long movie titled *The Natural History of the Chicken* or, as we knew it, simply “The Chicken Movie.” It is still among the strangest movies that I ever watched. Just a random collection of odd stories about chickens that really had nothing to do with their natural history. But we watched it enough times that it’s seared into my memory.

The last part of the movie told the story of a very fluffy, white, silkie bantam hen named Liza. Liza’s emotionally packed biography came to its climax when after months of trying she was finally able to hatch her first brood of chicks. Then, one fateful summer morning her owner was watching as all the chickens in the yard suddenly froze and then bolted for the nearest cover. They had spotted a hawk circling above. But as Liza darted for the chicken coop, she suddenly realized that her chicks were still standing in the middle of the yard, oblivious to the danger that was coming; so Liza turned and ran back to the chicks stretching out her wings for them to take cover just as the hawk went into its dive. The hawk misjudged the depth of Liza’s plumage and missed. She and the chicks were safe! A happy ending to an emotionally charged tale of a very brave chicken.

The story came to mind this week as I read our gospel account and heard Jesus’ words to the people of Jerusalem: **Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing (Lk 13:34).** God’s will in sending Jesus into this world was so that He could spread out His arms in love to protect His people from the

peril they had gotten themselves into. The problem was that the people weren't willing to listen to Jesus. They weren't willing, because in order to accept that Jesus was there to save them they would have first had to admit that they were in need of being saved.

Jesus wasn't the first one to be opposed by the people. In the past, God had sent prophets to preach a message of repentance to His people. They too had been rejected and opposed and many of them had been put to death. Jesus wasn't the last to be opposed either. Today, God is sending you as His prophets. He has commissioned you to bring the good news to all people that through Jesus Christ, God offers them salvation from their sins and refuge under His outspread arms. But because that free message of salvation requires first, that we admit we are sinful and that we need a Savior, what I believe you have found to be true is that it isn't universally popular. As Christians sharing that Gospel message, we still face serious opposition. So in light of that, how do we stand firm? How do we faithfully continue to carry out the mission God has charged us with? Today as we look at the ministry of God's prophet, Jeremiah, He gives us three guidelines for carrying out that work: Trust God's love and promise! Proclaim the law and the gospel! And finally, witness with bold confidence!

Just as God called Jeremiah to be His prophet to the people of Judah, He has called you and me to be His prophets to the people of Virginia, Maryland, West Virginia, or wherever you may be. There is no question that our country badly needs God-fearing people to stand up for the moral, ethical, and spiritual truths. You have an opportunity to witness to those truths with the way you live your lives and even with the words that you speak. As amazing as that privilege is, sometimes it can seem like a pretty daunting responsibility. If you've ever been in the position Jeremiah was in where you had to share with someone that the way they were living their life was sinful and they needed to repent, you know that isn't very easy.

If we back up just a little bit before where we picked up Jeremiah's story, in verse two as God is preparing Jeremiah to go preach this message to the people He says: **Tell them everything I command you; do not omit a word (Jer 26:2)**. Especially when we are telling someone that they have sinned and how serious their sin really is, it can be tempting to hold back, to try to soften the blow of God's law. But that was not what God wanted Jeremiah to do. And it's not what He wants us to do either.

So where can we come up with the resolve to point out somebody's sin when we know, in all likelihood they aren't going to appreciate that sentiment and it very well might damage our relationship with them? Jeremiah probably thought back to the words God had spoken when He first called Jeremiah to be a prophet to His people: **Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you. Do not be terrified by them... they will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you, declares the LORD (Jer 1:18-19)**. With that promise in mind, Jeremiah proclaimed the Word of the LORD to the people. And when he had finished, we're told that they formed a mob and threatened to kill him for speaking against their beloved Jerusalem.

Fast forward six hundred years to this morning's Gospel lesson and the scene hadn't changed much. Now, instead of another prophet, God had sent His own Son. But what difference did it make? Jesus' message was meeting the same response as Jeremiah's; people wanted Him dead. Jesus' response to King Herod and anyone else that wanted to stop Him was

that He would continue to carry out His Father's will regardless of what they thought or did. He would continue His mission until it reached its fulfillment with His death and resurrection.

Where do we find the strength and the fortitude we need to be God's prophets? Don't look at me! And don't look to yourselves, because all we'll find there is sin, doubt, and weakness. Look to Jesus. Look to the amazing love He showed you by dying for you on the cross, the same amazing love that He has asked you to share with the people around you. Yeah sometimes it's going to be tough love and that might seem a little scary, but then trust in His promise, the same promise He gave to Jeremiah, that you need not be afraid to proclaim His message because He will be with you always to the very end of the age.

Knowing that Jesus is with us as we act as His prophets fills us with courage, but it leaves us wondering, "What am I supposed to say? I mean, God gave Jeremiah word for word, the exact message he was to take to the people. Jesus is the Word of God made flesh so certainly He knew what to say! But what do I say? What message am I supposed to proclaim?" Well here it is, right (holding up a Bible)? God has given us the words to proclaim.

Well that's great, isn't it? Just a thousand pages, how hard could it be? Better make sure you block out a decent chunk of time if you're going to tell someone about God because it will take you a little over 70 hours to read them all of God's Word. I'm being a tad facetious. As we read the Bible on our own, and as we study it together here, what we find is that all throughout God's Word He gives us two main messages, the law and the gospel. God's law tells us that He demands us to be perfect. It shows us what perfect looks like, and how miserably we've failed to live up to those standards. And the law shows us what we deserve because of that: God's eternal wrath and punishment. And then we have the Gospel. The Gospel shows us not what we're required to do, but what Jesus has done for us. The Gospel shows us that in Jesus, our sins have been forgiven and now instead of eternal punishment we have an eternity of salvation to look forward to.

So if you're worried about what to say to someone you'd like to share God's Word with, remember that you don't have to go through the full council of God with them in that first sitting. You can start with just the basics and simply proclaim the law and the gospel.

That's exactly what Jeremiah did when he was grabbed by that mob and they were about to kill him. He said look, **The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the things you have heard.** Those "things" included the part that said Jerusalem was going to be wiped out because of the people's sin. It wasn't a pleasant thing to tell the people but Jeremiah did it anyway because that was the message God had sent him with. And only after he shared that message of the law was Jeremiah able to go on: **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.** He tears them down with the law, and then builds them up with the Gospel.

It isn't easy to tell someone what the Bible says about their sins: that because of them they deserve to go to hell. You know that message is going to be met by opposition, and sometimes that's all it takes to stop us from saying anything at all. But if we aren't willing to proclaim the law, then we never get to share the gospel. And that's the best part! As scary as it is to confront someone about their sin, it's a thousand times more rewarding to be able to share the good news with them that that sin has been forgiven through Jesus.

So finally, after teaching us in the Bible *what* we are to say, God urges us to go and say it not timidly or apologetically but with bold confidence! Look at how Jeremiah finishes his defense. He's just told them that the message he had delivered was not his, but God's. **Now as for me**, he says **I am in your hands; do with me whatever you think is good and right**. If they were going to continue to oppose Jeremiah, even if they chose to kill him, he knew that he had nothing to fear, because he had faithfully proclaimed the message that God had given him. More than that, he knew that God had promised to be faithful to him. And so he preached the Word with confidence.

Just like Jeremiah, God is sending you to be His prophets. And as you carry out that mission, just like Jeremiah, you are going to run into some pretty serious opposition. When that happens, remember to trust not in yourself, but in the love and the promises of God. Remember that the words you have to proclaim are not your words, but God's, as you communicate those age-old messages of His righteous law and His merciful gospel. And finally remember that your confidence in carrying out your mission as a Christian does not come from what you have done or what it is you're capable of doing. Your confidence comes from what Christ has done for you and knowledge of what He is able of accomplishing through you.

Amen.