

## **Sermon Reading: Jeremiah 26:8-15**

*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.”*

## **Sermon Theme: Refusing to Change**

It gets to a point where you can only help someone so much. You supported them as best as you were able. You did what you could. You tried over and over again. But it always seemed to fall on deaf ears. It was so frustrating leaving you exhausted and wore out when it was constantly one step forward two steps back. It gets really old when they manipulate your kind heart and take advantage of you. It hurts when they lash out in anger with words or even actions. It becomes even more difficult when other people will join their side and tell you, “Just leave them alone...mind your own business.”

Eventually it gets to a point where it seems like you can’t help someone who doesn’t want to be helped. We all know of someone like this—friends, maybe even family—someone who won for themselves the label “lost cause.” We see it in our daily lives, we see it in church where someone is stubbornly stuck in their ways refusing to change even when they have shown quite clearly that this is wrong and against God’s will.

So, you can understand a little bit of what is going on with Jeremiah. When looking at Jeremiah’s ministry many wouldn’t say it would be very fulfilling or successful. He goes from having a good king, to some really horrible kings—one who even openly threatened his life. Other prophets openly opposed him. They preached peace and

prosperity whereas Jeremiah—preaching the truth—warned of judgment and destruction. A priest had him beaten and put into the stocks. Another time he would be thrown into a cistern—a deep hole—where there was not water but only mud and he sinks down into it, left for dead. But what may have made it even more difficult was that he was sent to preach and teach to a people who refused to listen or change.

But, Jeremiah had a job to do. The Lord had sent him as his messenger of warning to the temple. The message is quite simple: the people of Judah need to change; make good, reforming their ways and their actions. Obey the Lord. Listen to his commands. Otherwise God would **“make this temple like Shiloh and this city an object of cursing among all the nations of the earth”** (Jeremiah 26:6). God’s warning: don’t think that because the temple is in Jerusalem that means he wouldn’t destroy the city and you with it. Case and point: look at Shiloh. The Tabernacle—the house of worship for all those years in the wilderness and for hundreds of years before the temple was built—had been at Shiloh. But now it’s destroyed. That’s what will happen to the temple and to Jerusalem if the people did not change. The temple would be destroyed and the city left “desolate and deserted.” This is a not-so-subtle implication that the people currently living in the city would either be killed or ripped away from their homes and lives carried off into captivity.

God doesn’t send you on a mission to preach from street corners and busy market places to warn people they need to change their ways or else. He does give us the responsibility to not ignore sin or sinful lives, to confront the sinner with God’s Law privately and forgive the repentant with the Gospel (Matthew 18:15). He does give you the responsibility to spur one another on and encourage each other to continue gathering together in God’s house and hearing God’s Word (Hebrews 10:24-25). He does call you to always be ready and prepared to give an answer for why you have the hope of eternal life (1 Peter 3:15). He does send us to be the light and salt of the earth that others may see our good deeds and glorify God (Matthew 5:15-16). He does send us to love one another just as Jesus has loved you (John 13:34-35). God doesn’t send you to warn people that their city is going to be destroyed. He does send you to share that unless someone has saving faith in their hearts, they will be lost forever in hell.

As soon as Jeremiah finished telling the people everything the Lord had commanded him to say, the people crowd around him so that he can’t get away, and seize him. They couldn’t believe that Jeremiah would say such horrible things would happen to this temple, to their city. “You must die!” they decide. They refused to listen. They refused to change. They couldn’t or, at the very least, didn’t want to see that there was any problem with them. All they wanted to hear was that there would peace and prosperity in the land, that how they were living and acting was just fine. And so, when the officials come to figure out what all the ruckus was about the priests and the prophets—

people who were supposed to be in tune with God’s Word and warnings—insist, **“This man should be sentenced to death because he has prophesied against this city!”** (v.11).

Again, you have an idea of what Jeremiah is dealing with here. Hopefully you aren’t facing real death threats, but you know how people refuse to change when you share God’s message. You were concerned for an individual because their drinking was getting out of hand, and you told them. They were working too much and needed to be spending more time with the family, and so you let them know. You reached out to a family member who had stopped coming to church. You invited them to come and hear more of God’s Word and to grow in it. You didn’t follow along with the crowd and join in when they were making fun of someone you know; instead, you defended them. You put someone else’s needs and wants before your own so that they would know Jesus’ love. You spoke up and warned an erring brother or sister in the faith. But he refused to change. She didn’t want to hear it. They more or less cut you out of their lives. They got upset with you, said some harsh, cruel things. They got more people to defend them and to gang up on you. They called you out on everything you’ve done wrong.

And so the next time I’m not as bold because what if that happens again? Your invitations weren’t accepted, so you wonder, “What’s the point? It never seems to work.” Maybe you figure it’s better to not say anything, do anything because it’s going to fail anyway. You become really good at finding all sorts of things to do instead of reaching out. Instead, it’s someone else’s responsibility, right? Or it’s simply you don’t want to make them upset again and so you decide they need some space, some peace.

And then there are the other times. Those times I’m the one in the crowd getting upset because of what I’m being told. We are quick to insist it’s not that bad or that you have it under control. We listen to the convincing lies of the devil, “God doesn’t really mean that...he doesn’t mean it that seriously.” You might try and ignore the truth thinking, “Pastor is talking about all these other people who really need to be hearing this today.” Or, “At least I go to church most Sundays or when I am able to. I’m here today, doesn’t that count for something?” We easily get upset that someone would dare tell you what you are doing is wrong. The excuse-making factory that we are works overtime to make all types of defenses to add more reasons why you shouldn’t have to change.

How many times have you ignored the help that is offered to you from God’s Word? How many times have I refused to listen to the truth? In sin, no one wants to be helped, no one wants to hear God’s Law—that includes you and me. It’s not just “they” who are the lost cause, it’s you and me who are lost because we fall into that temptation to refuse to change.

On my own I have all sorts of plans and intentions to improve with these glorious ideas of how I'm going to do it. But so often it stops at that. This change isn't going to come from me trying to be a better Christian or being more determined; it's not going to come from within you either. It starts and comes from your merciful and gracious Lord who, despite our refusal to listen, continues to share with you messages of peace and grace, Law and Gospel. He continues to give us a place to worship openly and regularly where—as of right now in our history—we still have no worries about government threats or other threats from the outside. But do not let the peacefulness or availability lull you into a false sense of security. The time is now for us to hear, listen, and obey.

Hear how God sent his Son who lived according to God's plan and will despite the many disappointments, frustrations, open hostility and opposition on the way. Nothing would stop him from completing his work; neither threats from a king who wanted to kill him nor the religious leaders who were trying to intimidate him. No, Jesus says he presses on today and tomorrow and the next day for the joy set before him to save you. It would be his innocent blood shed on that cross that would wash away your sins. For your salvation he was pierced and crushed under God's judgment for your stubborn, sinful heart. And by his wounds you are healed. God does not treat you as your sins deserve, but deals with you in mercy—mercy, because he is under no obligation to give you that love and still freely does. And so he sends the Holy Spirit working in Word and Sacrament to create a new heart and spirit within you. This new heart receives the forgiveness of sins won for you on the cross and desires to live according to God's will to his praise and glory, to serve him, and to serve your neighbor in love.

With that new heart of faith, today is the day of repentance, confess your sin, and turn to your Savior for full and free forgiveness. Today is the day to do the work of our Father in heaven, for night is coming when no one can work (John 9:4). And that work is to be like Jeremiah who willingly goes to share God's message to a people he knew would be upset and would not want to listen. You know the people who haven't been here in a while. They might be family, coworkers, friends, and each one of them is one who God sent his Son to save. God doesn't give up on you but continues to shower you with his forgiving grace and love. So be encouraged to continue to reach out, live, and share the Good News in the face of opposition and lack of visible results. Stand firm in the Lord who has forgiven you, awaiting your Savior who will transform us. This time he will make our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body. Amen.