

**THE MESSAGE for June 26, 2011**

**Jeremiah 28:5-9**

*Jeremiah... Prophecies Confirmed*

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Has someone ever made you feel uncomfortable by their very presence? You know, “that person” who makes everyone feel awkward by simply being there? Maybe it’s someone at work, or at school, or in your neighborhood, or in the church who just makes things difficult. Do you know “that person?”

Jeremiah is that person. Contrary to the song by “Three Dog Night,” Jeremiah was not a bullfrog. He was a prophet. And that’s why he makes people so uncomfortable. The people didn’t want to hear what God had to say to them through Jeremiah.

As a young boy, the Lord speaks to Jeremiah offering him a plum position as “God’s spokesperson.” Sounds great, right? Become a member of the clergy, wear all the neat robes and cool hats, a position of honor, work just one day a week – sweet! Where do I sign up?

But Jeremiah is not so willing to accept God’s call. Instead he declines God’s generous offer, saying he’s too young and can’t speak that well. God would do much better with someone else. Not interested, thank you very much. So God speaks into Jeremiah’s doubts with words of support and comfort:

*“But the Lord said to me, ‘Do not say, “I am only a boy;” for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you,’ says the Lord”* (Jeremiah 1:7-8).

When a deal sounds too good to be true, it probably is, right? That’s what it’s like for Jeremiah. God’s call is amazing and empowering, but there’s a catch. Jeremiah is to bring God’s word of judgment and condemnation to God’s people. Oh boy!?!? How does that call from God sound now? I want to know, why does God need to speak a word of judgment to the people?

**News flash:** God is faithful. Say that with me, *God is faithful*. God is always faithful but God’s people are not. God’s people are sometimes faithfully following God and God’s ways, at other times unfaithful and choose to follow the ways of other gods.

God remains faithful, speaking a word of love, calling the people to repent, to change their ways. No matter how far God’s people wander off, God remains faithful.

In Jeremiah’s day, God’s people were very unfaithful. They failed to focus on their relationship with God. They were spending a little less time in worship, less time in prayer, and more time at the marketplace, and more time at work. It seems innocent enough, but not to God. The people had become unfaithful, and that was not okay. Time to get them back!

Consider this:

What if, I started paying less attention to my wife, Amber, and more attention to other women? Do you think that would set well with her? NO! It would not! What if, I started wooing other women, do you think my wife, Amber, would be okay with that? No! She would not! And I shouldn't expect her to be okay with that.

As a matter of fact, I'm sure she would have a strong word of judgment to share with me about my behavior. She would not say to me gently, "Oh, that's okay I know you love me, Rob. Go and have a good time." No she would probably say, with more than a little attitude "HOW DARE YOU! STOP IT!!! NOW!!!"

That's what we have going on with God's people in Jeremiah's day. The people are wooing other gods. Our God is a jealous God. Say that with me, *our God is a jealous God*. Not jealous *of us* but jealous *for us*. God is jealous *for* our undivided attention. I am so thankful that my wife is jealous *for* me and I *for* her. That's what makes our relationship work. A healthy jealousy *for* one another is what makes every relationship work.

So God instructs Jeremiah... *"Tell them that if they don't return to me and forsake all the other gods, the temple in Jerusalem will be destroyed and they will be taken into captivity by a powerful army from the north. Their sins will bring them down. Tell them. Show them the errors of their ways. Call them to repentance. That's your job, Jeremiah! Go do it!"*

Jeremiah became "that person" to God's people. A guy nobody wants to be around because he told the truth and nobody wanted to hear it. Who likes to hear a threatening, condemning word from God? Who likes to be told to repent and change our ways? Isn't God supposed to be loving and forgiving, and make life better? Who wants to listen to a guy like Jeremiah? God's people didn't. They liked running around with other gods. They refused to listen to Jeremiah which meant they refused to listen to God. And so it happened.

King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon comes from the north and conquers Judah, destroying the temple in Jerusalem, and taking God's people into captivity for 70 years! God tells Jeremiah, *"And when your people say, 'Why has the Lord our God done all these things to us?' you shall say to them, 'As you have forsaken me and served foreign gods in your land, so you shall serve strangers in a land that is not yours.'" (Jeremiah 5:19)* A foreign army serving as an agent of God... Who would have thought?

Can you imagine Jeremiah's predicament? He loves the people, and he loves God. He is stuck in the middle pleading for God to show mercy, yet willing to deliver God's harsh words to the people.

After 40 years of speaking out, of being "that person" the people of God try to shut him up. They're tired of hearing it but they fail to see the problem is with them, not

with Jeremiah. Jeremiah finally cries out to God and curses the day he was born, hating his life and what God has done to him.

He says the word of the Lord is like a fire in his bones, and he's unable to *not* speak God's word, even if that means hardship for him personally. He is "that person" who makes everyone uncomfortable because he is speaking the truth. The people can't handle the truth. Jeremiah remains faithful to God no matter what the cost. If only God's people would do the same!

For Jeremiah there is room in our lives for only one God. Only God is worthy of our worship. Here's the thing, show me your calendar and your bank statements and I will show you who or what you worship. Show me your calendar and your bank statements and I will show you how important God is in your life.

*Do you pray everyday?* I don't mean "God is great God is good and we thank him for our food." I mean do you listen to what God is calling you to do today so that you might reflect God's love to others...

*Do you read your Bible everyday?* I mean actually read it and ponder how you might apply it to your life at home, at work, or at play...

*Do you see worship as the start of your week?* I don't mean just showing up and putting in an hour or so. I mean coming here with an attitude that God will touch your life in a powerful way and send you out of here to be an agent of God's grace in the world for the rest of the week...

*Do you give 10% of your income (or working towards giving 10% of your income) to God through the church offering plate?* If not, then the truth is God really isn't that important to you. Because when you are giving 10% you really are saying God I trust that you will continue to provide and I trust in you alone. According to the Bible giving 10% is the bare minimum...

*Do you forgive others and seek to be forgiven?* If not, then you are really nailing Jesus back on the cross. As we discussed last week, Jesus doesn't want to be on the cross. He conquered the cross for our forgiveness setting us free from the bondage of sin, death, and the devil. Please stop putting Jesus back on the cross, forgive as we have been forgiven...

Jeremiah speaks the word of God but the people didn't want to hear it or follow it. They prefer a word that didn't cost them anything. Oddly enough, there are other prophets who are more than willing to tell the people what they want to hear! That's what we find happening in our reading for today.

The people of God were in exile in Babylon for a few years with no relief in sight, despite God's word of warning through Jeremiah. Another "prophet," named Hananiah, speaks to the people, declaring "a new word of the Lord." Instead of calling the people to repent, an unpopular thing to do, this new word from Hananiah is that God will relieve

their burden by breaking the yoke of bondage to the king of Babylon! Good news! Suffering will end! Within a couple of years, we will get to go back to our homes! The temple will be restored! Everything will be like it was! God will deliver us! “Yeah, Hananiah!” “Yeah, God!” Can you hear the people?

It was what the people wanted to hear. The problem is it wasn't the word of the Lord. It was a lie. It may have given them hope but they were still failing to be faithful to God. Until the 70 years of exile are complete they would not be going home. Sin has its lasting consequences.

When we are stuck in sin, are we open to hearing the unpopular word of God through someone like Jeremiah? God's judgment for unfaithfulness is as true today as it was in Jeremiah's day. And yet, God deals with people like you and me in a very different way today. Listen to what God has decided to do:

*“The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors, when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt – a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more”* (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

God changes the rules. God changes the game. God will do whatever it takes to free us and restore our relationship with God. God does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. God makes our relationship possible because God is faithful.

That means God comes to you and for you, not through some prophet like Jeremiah with a word of judgment, but through Jesus, the Living Word of God, who brings God's Word of forgiveness and love. Our sin is real. And in Jesus, our sin is forgiven. You and I are delivered from bondage. You and I are released from captivity. You and I are restored and given a new life. God has done this. God is faithful.

So what are we to do? How might we respond? I can think of at least three things we can do:

**First, repent.** Let's get over ourselves. Let's admit our mistakes, admit our selfishness, and admit that we need to change our ways. Let's laugh at ourselves. Look around and accept the fact that not one of us here is perfect. But God who we gather here to worship is perfect. Jesus said, “Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4:17). And so it is! So let's trust God and do God's will even when it's inconvenient.

**Second, believe the gospel.** Feeling sorry for our sins is only part of the story. Accept God's amazing love for you in Christ Jesus, and live into the freedom he has given you. Live as a forgiven sinner and forgive the sins of others.

**Third, live like Jeremiah.** Live for the people you love. Speak the truth in love and hold one another accountable to the ways of Christ Jesus our Lord. Let's make Myerstown and the surrounding area a place where God's love rules in every heart, every home, every school, and every business.

Imagine a person living a faith-filled life by loving God and neighbor. Imagine a person who dares to speak the truth in love by holding others accountable to a Christ-centered lifestyle. Imagine a person who reflects the ways of Christ Jesus in thought, word and deed. Imagine you being "that person"! Amen.