

Jeremiah 26:8-15. ⁸ 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! ⁹ 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.

¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ 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!"

¹² 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. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ As for me, I am in your hands; do with me whatever you think is good and right. ¹⁵ 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."

Sent out in Truth.

The Word calls us to be faithful.

The Word calls us to be forthright.

The Word calls us to be fearless.

He didn't back down. He didn't even seem to flinch. Instead, he was faithful. He spoke all the words that God had given to him. Even as pressure mounted around him, even as the leaders threatened him, even as the crowd squeezed tighter to seize him and the voices yelled louder, he listened to the voice of God, and he didn't back down. He stood firmly upon the truth that God had given him. Even though that word dealt with some unpleasant and awful realities. He had to speak God's words faithfully.

Jeremiah had spoken words of warning and judgment against the people of Judah, he had spoken against the city, against the temple, the very house of God. He spoke all the words of truth God had given him. He was faithful. He was forthright. He was fearless; for he was sent out by God in truth.

As we consider Jeremiah's boldness today, what can we learn about proclaiming the Word as our church and in our personal lives? We too are sent out in standing on God's Word of truth. God's Word calls us to be faithful. His Word calls us to be forthright. His word calls us to be fearless.

As the pressures mount around us, we are to remain faithful to the Word God has given us. As many – including a good number of those within the Christian church - abandon the ways of God and back away from the truth of Scripture, there is a heavy pull for us to do the same. As the crowds become more brazen online, as pressures mount from friends and family to adjust our beliefs, as the court of public opinion shouts down our words of concern and rebuke as unneeded and unwanted. We pray that the LORD would keep us faithful.

The temptation is to just stay silent. Especially as it has become a bit treacherous to speak. We notice what is happening in the world around us, and we fear a similar backlash. We fear verbal attacks, perhaps we even fear that people will take action against us. We are tempted to stay silent as we fear offending people or turning people off to the rest of God's Word if we say something too harsh about sin. We fear we might lose loved ones by warning too sternly against sin. In the face of opposition, we flinch as genuine concern is silenced.

The LORD calls out to his people through his word of truth and he encourages us, he calls us, to be faithful, to be forthright, and to be fearless. Being faithful to God's Word means that we proclaim all of God's Word - both the bitter points of the law along with the full sweetness of the gospel. There is a temptation to back down to those who challenge such a message. There is a temptation to leave some of God's Word out, to sand off the rough edges, or to water down the Word. But that is not what God desires of his messengers. And as it turns out this is not a new temptation, this is not a new battle, but it is one that has been going on for a long time. As God has been in the past, he is still right there to strengthen and to encourage, to redeem and sanctify his people. Forgiven and fortified by our LORD he sends out his people to stand and to speak in truth.

As Jeremiah stands in the temple courts in the midst of an angry crowd, it is not a difficult jump to flash forward to Jesus our Savior standing among a crowd calling for his death. As Jeremiah speaks words of rebuke to a stubborn people, as he laments over their disobedience and warns of Jerusalem's destruction, we hear a sad echo in the words that Jesus would speak centuries later. ***"O 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, but you were not willing."*** (Luke 13:34). Both Jeremiah and Jesus would face difficulty, opposition, rejection, and yet they faithfully proclaimed God's Word, out of love for God, out of concern and love for those to whom they spoke. Therefore, let us today also struggle against that temptation to be silent and instead let us be faithful.

Remember, how God had called Jeremiah. Back in Jeremiah chapter 1, Jeremiah wasn't sure he would know what to say or even how to say it. Thus, in answer to his call to serve Jeremiah replied, "Ah, Sovereign Lord, I do not know how to speak; I am only a child." And this how the Lord replied to his servant Jeremiah. ***"Do not be afraid.... Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you."*** (Jeremiah 1:8) Sometime later the Lord affirmed that promise saying, ***"I will make you a wall to***

this people, a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you to rescue and save you.” Now after some 20 years of service, God had been faithful to Jeremiah and Jeremiah would continue to faithfully proclaim the message that God had given him. Backed and strengthened by his Lord He would be faithful. He would be forthright. He would be fearless.

God had sent Jeremiah to speak words of warning to his people. It was a message that he had proclaimed before, it was a message that was worth repeating again, especially now that a new king had taken the throne. Early in the reign of King Jehoiakim, the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah. The LORD told him to do and say this: ***Stand in the courtyard of the LORD’s house and speak to all the people of the towns of Judah who come to worship in the house of the LORD. Tell them everything I command you; do not omit a word.*** ³ ***Perhaps they will listen and each will turn from his evil way. Then I will relent and not bring on them the disaster I was planning because of the evil they have done.*** ⁴ ***Say to them, ‘This is what the LORD says: If you do not listen to me and follow my law, which I have set before you,*** ⁵ ***and if you do not listen to the words of my servants the prophets, whom I have sent to you again and again (though you have not listened),*** ⁶ ***then I will make this house like Shiloh and this city an object of cursing among all the nations of the earth.’***” Unable to recognize their sin, God’s people could not fathom why the LORD would threaten that the temple and their precious city, would become as deserted as the city of Shiloh after the Ark of the Covenant was lost to the Philistines. But God indeed was warning the people that his presence would be taken away from them if they continued in their sinful and disobedient ways. Even as the people shouted and called for his death, Jeremiah didn’t flinch. The sin of the people could not be ignored. God’s judgment had to be proclaimed. The warning had to be sounded and the call to repentance had to be voiced, and so Jeremiah faithfully proclaimed all the words God had given to him.

Here in was the source of Jeremiah’s confidence. What he proclaimed was the truth for it came from God. This was not something that Jeremiah was speaking on his own behalf because he was vindictive or spiteful toward his fellow people, but this was a message of deep concern. Other false prophets around him perpetuated the lie that appeased the people. Other voices said that everything would be alright, that God would disregard the people’s disobedience because this was his chosen people who lived in his chosen city which surrounded his temple, the house of the LORD. These voices were wrong, they were not from God, and so Jeremiah had to speak up. Even when they surrounded him, threatened and pressured him, Jeremiah would not keep silent.

After the priests and the prophets called for his death, Jeremiah did not back down, he didn’t step back, but stood on the Word of truth. 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. 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.”*** With unflinching boldness Jeremiah called the people to account, he warned them against the error of their ways and implored them to obey the LORD. For the LORD is a God of justice and he is a God of mercy.

Did you notice that last part? The LORD gave his people that the promise, the hope, that he would relent. To those who listened, to those who called on the name of the LORD he would show mercy. Jeremiah went to the people on behalf of a merciful God. God is just and powerful. He does not take kindly to disobedience and rebellion. But he is patient and merciful, abounding in love and faithfulness. In his great love, he sends out his messengers of grace to speak words of warning so that he might also relay his message of pardon and peace.

We may hesitate to speak God's words of warning because we understand that we too deserve his judgment. We have hearts that rebel. We have lives that fail to reflect his glory. Our ways are evil, defiant, rebellious. However, in our sinful pride, we do not like it all to be told that we are in the wrong. But out of his great concern for us, God calls out to us with his Word. His Word does not hesitate to expose our specific sins, to call us to proper repentance. It hurts, it irritates, it cuts to the heart, but it is necessary.

God in his great concern gives his Word to his church on earth, so that faithful pastors and leaders will speak all of his word to his people. For this is God's Word of Truth which calls sinners to see our sin *and* this same Word of Truth calls sinners near as our merciful God delivers his message of pardon and peace. Our God is a God of both justice and mercy, and he sends us out with this word of truth. He takes away our fears, for even though we deserve punishment, he does not treat us as our sins deserve. There is this raw beauty in repentance as God not only exposes our sin and opens our eyes to see the punishment that we deserve, but he points our eyes to the cross where Jesus our Savior gracious takes that punishment in our place. At the cross, God's wrath is satisfied; and that perfect love of God in Christ Jesus drives out our fear. In view of this incredible mercy of God and standing on God's Word of truth, therefore, let us not be silent, but fearless, and forthright, and faithful. For we know that our God is the God of perfect justice and perfect mercy. His Word which has called us to be his own has the power to change the hearts of others. God's Word has the power to change lives, to reform sinful ways, to forgive, to restore, and to set people apart for God to lives of service. His Word has the power to set us apart even in the face of opposition.

Today we give thanks for the gift of God's Word; for not only has God given us an example of faithfulness in the prophet Jeremiah to teach encourage, and inspire us, but he has given us a Savior in Jesus who did not flinch in his mission to save us. He came and proclaimed a message of repentance, warning the people of the dangers of sin and unbelief, calling the people back to God. When sinners rejected God's own Son and called for his death, Jesus did not back down, he did not flinch, even in the face of suffering and death. Jesus was resolute in his mission to save. He was faithful. He was forthright. He was fearless. May God call us to follow him in faith. For the one who forgives our rebelliousness and sin calls us and compels us to speak his word in all its truth. Lord Jesus, forgive and fortify your people so that we too may be faithful, forthright, and fearless. Amen.