

December 26, 2021 – Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Beaver Dam, Wisconsin  
St. Stephen, Deacon and Martyr

### **Jeremiah 26:1-9, 12-15**

*In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah, king of Judah, the following word came from the LORD.*

*<sup>2</sup> This is what the LORD says. Stand in the courtyard of the LORD's house, and speak to people from the cities and towns of Judah who have come to worship at the House of the LORD. Tell them everything I have commanded you to tell them. Do not hold back a single word. <sup>3</sup> Maybe they will listen, and everyone will turn from his evil way. Then I will relent and not bring about the disaster that I was planning because of the evil things they have done.*

*<sup>4</sup> You are also to say this to him.*

*This is what the LORD says. If you will not listen to me and follow my law, which I have set before you, <sup>5</sup> and if you do not listen to the words of my servants the prophets, whom I have sent to you again and again (but you have not listened), <sup>6</sup> then I will make this house like Shiloh, and I will make the name of this city a curse word for all the nations of the earth.*

*<sup>7</sup> The priests, the prophets, and all the people listened as Jeremiah spoke these words at the House of the LORD. <sup>8</sup> When Jeremiah had finished saying everything the LORD had commanded him to say to all the people, then the priests, the prophets, and all the people seized him and said, "You must die!" <sup>9</sup> Why do you prophesy in the name of the LORD that this house will be like Shiloh and that this city will be desolate with no one living here?" All the people crowded around Jeremiah in the House of the LORD.*

*<sup>12</sup> Then Jeremiah said to all the officials and to all the people, "The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the things that 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 about the disaster he has pronounced against you. <sup>14</sup> But as for me, look, I am in your hands. Do with me whatever seems good and right in your eyes. <sup>15</sup> But you can be certain of this. If you put me to death, you will bring innocent blood on yourselves and on this city and on those who live here, for it is true that the LORD has sent me to you to speak all these words in your hearing."*

Do you remember that very first time you stood in front of people to make a speech or give a presentation? Was it in middle school or high school? How did you feel? Knees knocking? Dry mouth? Sweaty palms? It probably wasn't the content of what you had to present that made you feel that way. More likely it was that first-time experience. For some it got easier as you did it more often. For others it may never have gotten any easier. For you it was that situation that caused anxiety. But now think about Jeremiah. He was not a trained speaker. He was a farmer and rancher. He herded a flock of sheep and tended a vineyard. Now the Lord God tells him to go to the temple courtyard and proclaim the message that God was giving him. Surely it was both the setting and the message which could have caused him great anxiety.

The Lord God wanted Jeremiah to talk to people so that they would change their ways and come back to him before it was too late. It was a strong warning that Jeremiah was to proclaim: *“Tell them everything I have commanded you to tell them. Do not hold back a single word. <sup>3</sup> Maybe they will listen, and everyone will turn from his evil way. Then I will relent and not bring about the disaster that I was planning because of the evil things they have done.”*

The responsibility the Lord gave Jeremiah could be stated this way:

### **Stand Up for God’s Truth!**

The Lord God not only gave Jeremiah the message, he also gave Jeremiah the reason for proclaiming this powerful message of repentance. He wants us also to see that Standing up for the Truth of God’s Word is important because God’s Truth Rescues Sinners.

The people of Judah had heard this message before from other prophets and even from Jeremiah, but they needed to hear it again. In chapter two the Lord told Jeremiah to ask the people of Judah: *“What fault did your fathers find in me, that they strayed so far from me? They followed worthless idols and became worthless themselves.” (2:5)* The people worshipped the Lord in the temple in the morning but their evenings were spent in excitement as they climbed the hills to the groves and altars dedicated to Ashtoreth and offered break cakes. The Lord had told Jeremiah: *“My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water. (2:13)* Jeremiah was to call the people to repentance, to tell them the truth about their own sinful hearts. He was to tell them and to not omit a word: *Cursed is the man who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away for the Lord. The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? (17:5, 9)*

What a strong, piercing message God gave Jeremiah! The impressive part of this message was that even though God promised the destruction of Jerusalem and captivity for its people, he said that he would back away from what he intended if Judah would return to him. As Jeremiah stood in front of the crowd in the temple courtyard he stood up with the truth, but he reached out to them with a wonderful message that the truth of God’s Word rescues sinners.

Day by day, it seems to me that our times are not that different from the days of Jeremiah. The people of this world are so ready to present an appearance of godliness, but their hearts, their values, their actions have departed from God’s will for his people. First we must apply Jeremiah’s to ourselves to see our own sinfulness and our need to turn to the Lord in repentance. His message assures us that when we do that the Lord *“will relent and not bring about the disaster (he) was planning.”* That’s the promise of Christmas and Easter. Through the Baby of Bethlehem God has turned away from his anger toward our sin.

But more than applying this message to ourselves, God also wants us to be Jeremiahs. We probably won’t go to the weekly farmer’s market and start speaking to the vendors and shoppers. But we can speak to family members, friends, neighbors, etc. about God’s will for their lives. We can remind them that the world will end and that there will be a Judgment

Day. This is why your life is so important. The truth of God's Word needs to be proclaimed. People need to know that the only cure for sin and the only hope for eternity is Jesus.

Not only Jeremiahs but we can learn to speak as St. Stephen did: *"You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him— you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it." When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."* (cts 7:51-56)

Jesus wants us to share the truth of his second coming and not hid it. He wants people filled with fear and crying out with the Philippian jailor, *"What must I do to be saved?"* We have the privilege of pointing people away from trusting in themselves and thinking only of their own desires. It is our God-given privilege to point them to Jesus as John the Baptist one did with these powerful words: *Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."*

Do you see why your life is so important to other people? Someone needs to speak the truth in love and let people know how far they have fallen of God's glory. Someone needs to let them know that there is only one cure and that is found in Jesus. This job is so tough because people don't want to listen to the truth. Unlike the person who looks to the surgeon for help with an ailing heart, they don't want to see their problem of sin and they don't want Jesus as their cure. God's plan is to use us as the Lord told Jeremiah, *"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."* (v. 3)

Jeremiah sure got into more than his share of trouble for telling people the truth about what was coming in the future. We are reminded both by the life of Jeremiah and the death of St. Stephen that Standing Up for the Truth of God's Word Attracts Trouble. It isn't only here in chapter 26. Page through the prophecy of Jeremiah and look at what happened to Jeremiah because he stood up for the truth of God's Word. Imprisonment on several occasions. Exile. Persecution by the people, the religious leaders and the civil authorities. Thrown naked into a cistern that held no water and was cold and muddy.

He shared these hard words of the Lord. *"If you do not listen to me and follow my law, which I have set before you, 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), then I will make this house like Shiloh and this city and object of cursing among all nations of the earth."* (vs. 4-5) These words about making the house of the Lord like Shiloh were fighting words that filled them with such hatred and anger. They grabbed Jeremiah and tried to immediately put him to death. Shiloh was the place where the tabernacle was set down for many years before the temple was built. A thriving city built up around the worship. When the Tabernacle, the tent temple, was moved to Jerusalem Shiloh became nothing, similar to some of the virtual ghost towns

here in central Wisconsin. They could brush off generic warnings about Babylonians coming, but they could not handle such specific warnings about Jerusalem turning into a ghost town like Shiloh.

The people crowded around Jeremiah not patting him on the back and hailing him as a hero, but threatening him with taunts and raised fists. He was accused of false preaching and disloyalty. He was threatened with death. Yes, following the Lord's calling to stand up for the truth attracted plenty of trouble for Jeremiah.

Despite the trouble that he attracted by standing up for the truth Jeremiah was not deterred from proclaiming the Lord's message. He told the people crowded around him: *"As for me, I am in your hands; do with me whatever you think is good and right. 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."* (. 14-15)

Jeremiah sure got more than his share of trouble for telling people the truth about what was coming in the future. He was seized and threatened with death for proclaiming the message entrusted to him. Can we expect anything less severe? In our days of political correctness and intolerance for Biblical morality we will not be surprised that when we stand up for the truth of God's Word trouble comes our way. The letter to the church in Philadelphia encourages us to continue to stand on the truth of God's Word: *"I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have so that no one takes your crown."* (Rev. 3:11)

Now this may not seem like a very "Christmassy" sermon. But it is! The birth of Jesus brought trouble to the infants of Bethlehem. Our faithful witnessing about the truth of Christmas is precisely what Jeremiah and St. Stephen did. Their message was a message of rescue for sinners and despite the trouble their proclamation attracted they would not be turned away from proclaiming God's Word. Here is our direction and our strength as we Stand Up for the Truth of God's Word.