

JESUS, SAVIOR FROM ALL TROUBLES

Jeremiah 19:14-20:6 (EHV)

14 Then Jeremiah came back from Topheth, where the LORD had sent him to prophesy, and he stood in the courtyard of the House of the LORD and said to all the people: 15 “This is what the LORD of Armies, the God of Israel, says. I will certainly bring on this city and on all its towns every disaster that I have pronounced against it, because they have become stiff-necked, refusing to hear my words.” 20:1 Now Pashhur the priest, the son of Immer and the chief officer in the House of the LORD, heard Jeremiah prophesying about these things. 2 Pashhur ordered that Jeremiah the prophet be beaten, and he put him in the stocks at the Upper Benjamin Gate in the House of the LORD. 3 The next day when Pashhur released him from the stocks, Jeremiah said to him, “The LORD does not call you Pashhur, but Magor-Missabib (*which means, “Terror on Every Side”*), 4 for this is what the LORD says: I will certainly make you a terror to yourself and to all your friends. They will fall by the sword of their enemies before your very eyes. I will hand Judah over to the king of Babylon. He will carry the people captive to Babylon, and he will kill them with the sword. 5 Also, the riches of this city, all its property, and all the treasures of the kings of Judah—I will give it all away into the hands of their enemies. They will plunder them, seize them, and carry them off to Babylon. 6 As for you, Pashhur, and all who live in your house, you will go into exile. You will go to Babylon! You will die there, and you will be buried there, you and all your friends to whom you have prophesied falsely.”

Jeremiah was one of the later Old Testament prophets. He was called to preach repentance to a backsliding Israel, but because of their hard hearts, Jeremiah the preacher of repentance became Jeremiah the messenger of judgment. You can imagine that the message of judgment was not popular at all, and Jeremiah’s life was in danger many times. But he was compelled to preach the truth, and he was certain that the Lord would protect him.

In our Gospel lesson, Jesus tells us that every Christian has that same certainty. By virtue of our faith, every single Christian is a messenger of Christ—but whether any one of us is active in that capacity is another story. So often fear will keep a Christian from proclaiming the Savior.

We live in a world that’s antagonistic toward Christ and his followers, either openly or subtly. Many of our high school and college students will find themselves on the front lines of this war against their faith once again this fall, and you and I can meet up with this in the workplace, on the street, or even when relaxing with family or friends. Any Christian may lose friends because of their faith—or you might lose your reputation, even employment; you may be harassed in any number of ways because of your Christian confession.

Jeremiah uncovers several sins and temptations both in his opponent, one of the priests of Israel, and in our lives today—in challenges to our faith.

First, there is Passhur's passionate objection. Jeremiah's message of judgment wasn't good for morale, and the people of Jerusalem were getting upset when the prophet called their spirituality into question. To make the king happy – the king at this time was flip-flopping between a liberal faith that didn't take God's word seriously and no faith at all – to make this king happy, Passhur the priest had Jeremiah beaten up. This was similar to what happened to Jesus at trial. So now our prophet was bloodied, bruised, probably with some broken ribs and I wouldn't be at all surprised to learn that he had been whipped, too – and that wasn't all. Passhur wasn't just an ordinary priest. He was the 'chief officer' in the Lord's Temple, probably a kind of vice-president to the high priest himself. He had the authority to do whatever he pleased, and he was especially in charge of temple security. So he also had Jeremiah put into the stocks.

These weren't stocks like we might think of for his hands or his feet. This was a kind of scaffold where his body would be twisted and distorted into a very painful position and his hands and feet were either bolted with wooden forms or tied in place. It was very similar in its function to a cross; to being crucified.

But the next morning, Passhur decided to spare Jeremiah's life, and he had him released, hoping it would shut Jeremiah up. It didn't. Jeremiah lets us know with his words that Passhur's message was the opposite of God's message. God wanted the people to repent; Passhur the priest was happy with the people doing what they were doing – including all of their sins.

We face similar "popular opinion" resistance today, both to God's commandments and to Christian doctrine. Like Jeremiah, we can face "terror on every side."

- Popular opinion resists God's will about marriage. More and more people don't even consider marriage to be an option, and they challenge God's will and openly invite God's judgment.
- Popular opinion would have Christians give up God's holy word as we are bullied by our nation to accept things like homosexuality as a mere choice, abortion as a choice, and now we're beginning to here and old, old bigotry that wants us to accept racism as a choice as well.
- Popular opinion within our church would have us give up on the more difficult doctrines like church fellowship – after all, if the ELCA and the Missouri Synod aren't worried about it, who are we to say anything? Are we just being old fashioned? And when it comes to my wedding or my loved one's funeral, do we have to be so strict, since after all it's my day?

In our text, when this priest, Passhur, attacks Jeremiah over these and other things, God steps in to show things from God's point of view.

- God changes the priest's name to "terror on every side" – that's what his judgment will be in exile, with fear everywhere, every day, for the rest of his life, and unless he repents, that's what his eternity in hell will be: Terror on every side."
- God commands the exile of Judah, and God commands the Babylonians to plunder the city, too. Take it! Take them! Take all of it! They rely on themselves, and God's will is that they would learn what it means to abandon God by being abandoned by God.
 When we make a decision to leave God's will because we think most people do something else, we need to realize that we're abandoning God like Israel did. Now we might think that God will lose sight of us in the crowd. What does God care what I do in my own wedding, or in my own bed, or in my own mind, when there's so much bad in the world? But God tells us that he cares, because his judgment goes from Israel right to this theologically bankrupt priest.
- Passhur the priest, God says, will be exiled, too, just like the whole nation. But unlike the nation, this priest would never return. He was going to die in exile, and God extended his judgment to his flock: "You and all of your friends."

Now, God has given us a Savior to rescue us even from our sins of personal preference, and going along with the majority, and thinking that my choices are more important than my baby's choices, or that my comfort zone is more important than the soul of the person I'm sinning with; more important than the word of God passed down unchanged from Moses to Jeremiah to Jesus to Paul to us.

Jesus' blood, my repentant brothers and sisters, covers over us and makes us right and righteous and whole and holy once again. And the work of the Holy Spirit in us is to turn us back to the word and the will of God the Father.

When Israel turned away from God's word, they were on their own, and they lost everything. When we repent, we are returned to God's compassion and his protection, and we gain everything. If that means giving up some of my sinful and selfish choices, isn't the freedom and bliss of God's love and protection worth giving up anything at all? If I could give up my left hand to be saved, wouldn't I do it? Why won't we give up the things that tempt us? Let go of your sin and your sinful inclinations, and be swept away in the love of Christ, and he will save you from all your troubles, earthly and unearthly, he will protect you from all your tormenters – mental, spiritual, physical, emotional. And he will bring you home forever, to eternal life. Amen.