

# Written Copy: "Just Tell Us What We Want to Hear-Jeremiah 23:16-22

Proper 15-10<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost

Sunday, August 18<sup>th</sup>, 2019

## Text: Jeremiah 23:16-22

<sup>16</sup> Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD. <sup>17</sup> They say continually to those who despise the word of the LORD, 'It shall be well with you'; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, 'No disaster shall come upon you.'" <sup>18</sup> For who among them has stood in the council of the LORD to see and to hear his word, or who has paid attention to his word and listened? <sup>19</sup> Behold, the storm of the LORD! Wrath has gone forth, a whirling tempest; it will burst upon the head of the wicked. <sup>20</sup> The anger of the LORD will not turn back until he has executed and accomplished the intents of his heart. In the latter days you will understand it clearly. <sup>21</sup> "I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied. <sup>22</sup> But if they had stood in my council, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people, and they would have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their deeds.

## Exegetical Statement

Jeremiah is speaking against the prophets in Jerusalem who claim they are speaking the LORD's message to them which received in their dreams. They are telling God's people just what they want to hear: that all is well, God is really not angry with them, no harm will come to their city or their temple. Yet God didn't share this message with them and didn't send them with it to the people. They are speaking the desires of their own hearts which are lies. Jeremiah was sent to speak the truth: that their half-hearted worship of the LORD coupled with their dishonest practice where the rich took advantage of the poor, the widows, the indigent, and the orphans would bring a strong response from the LORD. They thought that the LORD didn't really take notice of these things or would give them a pass because of their position and since the city was favored with His Temple. But His burning anger would come down upon their heads like a violent storm comes down and a tornado spins the helpless person around like a top. It would be manifested in the Babylonians who, in the end, because the people continued to listen to God's true prophets, would totally destroy the city, the palace and the temple-taking most of those who survived the invasion captive back to Babylon. The LORD proclaims that if these false prophets had only inquired of the LORD and His words, had faithfully listened to what Jeremiah proclaimed, then the people would've turned back to the LORD and be saved. But instead they held fast to the message they wanted to hear, a message that is useless like the chaff that is separated from the wheat and discarded. And just like the chaff in end they will be burned up. God's anger would be poured out on Jerusalem and would not stop until the LORD's will is accomplished. They were to stand as a sign for all generations to come that when the desire of their own hearts are held over and above the word of the LORD they are choosing the LORD's judgment over salvation. Jeremiah's word was instead like the wheat; it had value-eternal value. Like fire God's word burns away the sin we hold fast to in our heart, and like the hammer it breaks hearts of stone so that faith may reign that trusts in God and His Word alone.

## Focus Statement:

The LORD tells us what we don't want to hear not out of anger but out of love. Jesus came to die on the cross and rose again so that we might be saved from the judgment and destruction that comes to all who live by their own heart's desire. He grants the faith we need to hold fast to His promises of salvation, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life even when it means not doing the opposite of what we desire and what the world says is right.

## Function Statement:

### Why it's important to know:

Like those of Jeremiah's time we desire to hear that God is happy with the way we live and that the desires of our heart are OK with Him. He just wants us to be happy. So we will latch on to whomever preaches words we want to hear and bring disdain and anger towards those who tell us what we don't want to hear. But as with those in Jeremiah's day living to please myself will end in judgment and eternal destruction

### What the hearer should do as a result:

Do not listen to the preachers who say that Jesus came so that you might have a great life now with peace and prosperity. Realize that following Him will bring division with the world. Believe that Jesus desire for you is not always temporal happiness, but that you might find happiness and joy in Him and remain in faith until the day of Resurrection

## Subject Sentence: What We Want to Hear Is Not God's Word

Have you ever had to tell someone something that they really don't want to hear?

I can't imagine what it's like being one of those soldiers who has to call on the families of servicemen and women and inform them that their loved one died in combat, or in a tragic accident. It's hard when we are called on to pass along to extended family that a loved one has passed away.

Of course there are other less serious situations when we might not want to volunteer to be the bearer of bad news. Such as when a friend or a loved one is overreacting to a situation; when they are losing it and you are the one elected to calm them down. When you're in the middle of an argument between two friends, and you actually see one of them more in the wrong, but you don't want to tell them, especially when they're prodding you with "You know what I mean; right?" How about when you're riding in the car with someone and they are tailgating the car in front of you, and you know they don't take kindly to comments about their driving? Or how about when they exhibit a touch of road rage and you have to talk them down? You're afraid that if you don't intervene things could escalate and cause an accident, or move the other driver to respond in escalation, trying to run you off the road, or possibly pull a weapon on you.

How about when you see someone struggling with sin? When they are headed in the wrong direction spiritually? When their worship attendance starts to slack, they start hanging around with a questionable crowd, when you see them going places and doing things that Christians shouldn't be involved in. When they are sliding down the slippery slope of sin toward unbelief and it falls upon you to say something. When a friend or loved is living together with their significant other outside of marriage. When that significant other is the same sex that they are. When they begin to talk about a gender transformation. These can be very difficult situations for a Christian to approach. Especially when your friend, family member, or loved one doesn't see anything wrong with what they're doing in the eyes of God. When you know anything you say will be taken wrong and can escalate to argument status. These are times when it just seems easier to agree with the popular proverbial saying "Judge not lest you be judged." And after all, as many other denominations are now preaching: "Jesus is a God of love and is accepting of all people. We should be too."

Jeremiah knows what its like to be called to proclaim an unpopular message to friends, relatives, and fellow countrymen that they don't want to hear. The people of Judah and Jerusalem were living lifestyles that they considered to be totally acceptable. But the LORD did not agree. Now if you asked the religious leaders: the prophets and priests, and the King and his advisors they might admit that things weren't perfect. But hey, we are all doing pretty good. There is peace and plenty. There are always times when the rich and powerful take advantage of the widows, the orphans, the indigent. But we still regularly worship the LORD. And just to make sure everything remains fine we give an offering or two to some of our neighbor's gods just to hedge our bets. And after all, Jerusalem is the city that the LORD picked to build His temple and dwell in. He would never allow it or the city to be destroyed.

But Jeremiah had a newsflash for them. The LORD was not happy at all with how the rich treated the poor, or with their half-hearted worship that stunk of idolatry. He had been warning them time and again, this generation and the ones preceding it that their idea of truth stood in opposition to Him. Their continued sinful obstinance had cause the LORD's anger burned against them so fiercely that He was sending the evil wicked nation of Babylon against them. The LORD sent His prophet Jeremiah to give them final warning so that they might change their ways and repent. So late in the game this would not avoid the Babylonian invasion, but a change of their hearts might prevent total destruction of Judah and Jerusalem.

As you can imagine Jeremiah's message was very unpopular. Not just because it stood against the rosy and optimistic outlook the powers that be, but also because the official prophets and priests called Jeremiah a liar. The prophets claimed that they too had messages from the LORD given to them in dreams and were told that all would be well and none of Jeremiah's awful prophetic words would come true. Jeremiah responded with the words of the LORD who said these prophets are not prophets at all and do not speak for the LORD but instead for themselves. They speak messages from their sinful minds and hearts, and not the council of the LORD. The LORD proclaims (**Jeremiah 23:21**) **"I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied."**

Because the people have been listening to these false prophets, they have given up their faith in the truth of the One True God, and instead clung to the lies of men. And they sided with the priests and false prophets in branding Jeremiah a false prophet that needed to be quieted or killed. They publicly humiliated him, arrested him and beat him. They banned him from worshiping in the temple. They even at one point threw him down into a well intending to leave him for dead. By totally disgracing him and despising him the people of Jerusalem sealed their own fate. **(Jeremiah 23:22) “But if they had stood in my council, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people, and they would have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their deeds.”** If only they had listened to the truth of the LORD’s word, they would’ve been moved by the Spirit to turn away from their sinful lifestyle and with repentant hearts be saved from total destruction in this life and from eternal destruction in the next. Some thought they could hide their sinful lifestyle from the LORD. To this He responded in **Jeremiah 23:23-24** <sup>23</sup> **“Am I a God at hand, declares the LORD, and not a God far away? <sup>24</sup> Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the LORD.** Nothing they did escaped God’s notice.

Jeremiah had certainly been called to deliver a very unpopular message to a whole country full of people who didn’t want to hear it. He probably would’ve rather just left these people to their own devices, especially after he and his message were rejected the first couple times. In prayer he asked God why he was chosen to deliver messages to those who will not listen, as well as praying that God would take vengeance upon the people. But at the same time Jeremiah realized that if he neglected to preach God’s word as he had been sent to do he would be no better than the false prophets who led God’s chosen astray. Jeremiah would be guilty of withholding God’s Word, the very tool that the Spirit uses to change hearts and minds, and create faith in repentant hearts.

Who has God called you to preach an unpopular message to? How easy would it be just to let them go their own way? How much easier would it be to buy in to the post-modern notion that they can live by their own truth, and you live by your own truth, and that’s OK because Jesus is accepting of all truths. There are many false prophets today who claim to

be the Church who preach the same kind of lives as these false prophets of Jerusalem. Some of them have the power and clout of TV and Radio audiences. It would make our lives so much easier, except for one problem. Jesus never said He was accepting of all truths. Instead He said **“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”** When we try to define truth from our own heart it will always be “our truth” and not the LORD’s truth. The Son of God became the Son of Man to most clearly define what God’s truth is. He sent His Words of Law and Instruction to point out all the ways our own personal truth stands sinfully apart from God’s One Truth. But not desiring that we should suffer God’s wrath for our disobedience, and the sinful presumptuousness to think we could ever have our own truth that was equal to God’s, He came to save us from the kind of fate that overcame those in Jerusalem. He came to take our place and suffer our punishment on the cross. Because He suffered and died for you, and for me, even when we choose lifestyles that anger our Holy and pure LORD, He will not punish us now or at the end on the Last Day. Jesus took all of God’s righteous wrath that should’ve come to us. He died so that you and I might have life now and eternal life to come.

But that life now is not a life of “I can do whatever I want and live how I want to live.” We’ve been given a life that is now directed by the Holy Spirit, whom He gave to us in Baptism. It’s a life defined by seeking to live by the truth of God’s Word instead of our own truth. In our hearts we still have that sinful desire to live according to our own truth. But as baptized believers we have a competing truth, a competing voice that directs us as a love response to live for Christ, to live by His truth as shown to us in His Word. And when we fail, and each one of us will fail; instead of condemnation we receive forgiveness. Forgiveness from Christ, who uses His words of law to point to our sins so that we can repent of them and know we still stand before God in Jesus’ righteousness-the right standing that He earned for us.

And it’s in that right standing, as humbled yet forgiven Christians, He sends us out with the same calling as Jeremiah. For most of us our calling is not on the same scale as Jeremiah’s. But He sends us into the lives of those we encounter as we go about our daily rituals. We carry His truth as contained in our Bibles. And we are given His Spirit to enable us to speak

that truth in love to those we encounter in our daily lives. Speaking to them not as one superior who has all the answers in ourselves, or as those whose lives align perfectly with God's truth. But as one who, like them, needs the Spirit to show us our sin, then show us our Savior. And then empower and enable us to live lives that are along the path to the perfect eternal future to come.

What will that mean for you and for me? It means that while through Jesus we have peace with God, we will not always have peace with the world. As Jesus warns us in **Luke 12:51-53** <sup>51</sup> **Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.** <sup>52</sup> **For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three.** <sup>53</sup> **They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."** Division will happen outside and even inside the family as we speak God's truth into a world that does not want to accept it. But we can and should speak that truth in love, the love of Christ, not judging others by our own standards, but sharing God's words of law to try to save them from the eternal judgment to come. It's a tall order. Jeremiah struggled with it. You and I will too. But we struggle with the LORD Himself by our side, active in our hearts as well as theirs. The same LORD who by His power changed our truth, is changing our lifestyle to be more like His, and has the power to change the lives of any and all we come into contact with. May your faith rest in Him now and unto eternal life. Amen.