

Just speak what the Lord has given you.

Text: Jeremiah 38:1-13 for 9/16/2018 by Pastor Bolwerk

Have you ever been in this situation: You're doing a task that someone gave you to do, and all of a sudden someone is yelling at you and harassing you simply because you're doing what you were told to do? Maybe this person didn't like the way you were doing things. Perhaps this person did not want that task done in the first place. So, now you have become the focus of their anger. It doesn't seem fair. You were given a task by someone in authority over you and that person expects you to complete this task. Now someone else is causing you to suffer because you were faithful in doing your work.

If you can understand how that feels then you can understand how Jeremiah probably felt. He was simply doing what God had told him to do: Speak God's word to the people of Jerusalem. But there were some people who didn't like what Jeremiah was saying. And because they had the power to do so they persecuted Jeremiah. These people caused Jeremiah to suffer as they worked to stop him from doing what God had told his prophet to do.

God has also given us words to speak. God wants us to tell people about his good name, proclaiming to the people of this world his law and his gospel. And like Jeremiah, our heavenly Father wants us to be faithful in our work. So ...

Theme: Just speak what the Lord has given you.

I. The world will persecute you for it.

II. But God will send the help you need.

At the beginning of our text we find Jeremiah doing that very thing: Speaking the words God had given to him. Twice Jeremiah plainly says, "**This is what the Lord says**" (vs. 2, 3), and then he tells the people what God told him to say. Jeremiah made it clear he was speaking God's words, and God expected him to say these things to the people.

Yet quite often the world doesn't like what God has to say. So the world attacks those who proclaim the Lord's message. It attacks using worldly weapons. The world attacks by persuading worldly powers to make believers stop speaking. The men who wanted to get rid of Jeremiah did that by going to the king. They persuaded the king by using human reason to make God's word sound like something bad. They said, "**He is discouraging the soldiers who are left in this city, as well as all the people, by the things he is saying to them**" (v. 4). Jeremiah's message certainly did sound discouraging, but God was trying to save people through that message.

That same thing still happens today. The people of this world try to influence those in power to see God's truth as something bad. They say God's message is 'intolerant.' They tell us that calling people sinners makes them feel bad. These things are true; God does not tolerate sin and calling people sinners can certainly make them feel bad. But, again, God is trying to save people through that message.

What can be frustrating is when those who persecute us even claim to be 'believers' in the true God. The men who attacked Jeremiah were his fellow Jews. These men were leaders who should have known God's word; men who should have recognized Jeremiah as God's prophet. Instead, they were ruthless in how they treated God's messenger.

Sometime so-called 'Christians' attack us. When we speak God's law they tell us to stop being so 'hateful', so 'close-minded' or 'un-accepting.' They tell us we need to be more 'loving' and 'accepting' of people and their sinful behavior. These 'Christians' try to stop us from speaking the Lord's truth.

But does that really happen? Do you find yourself being persecuted for speaking the truths of scripture? If the answer is 'no' then you have to ask yourself 'why?' Why is it that we are not speaking God's word? God has certainly given us words to speak. Through Moses God even says that his word "**is in your mouth and in your heart**" (Deuteronomy 30:14). It's right there ready to speak. Jesus also wants us to go and proclaim his gospel. So why is it we may not be speaking that word?

It could be because we don't know God's word. If we are not reading, and studying, and learning that word, then won't know it to proclaim it. Yet more often the problem seems to be that we don't like persecution. We don't like to suffer. Because of that fear of persecution, how often do we say nothing when God sets before us an opportunity to speak? How often do we ignore a fellow believer's sin and not speak God's law because we are afraid of how they will react? How often are we afraid of standing up for

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God and his truth because we know the persecution it is going to bring?

It is for these reasons that we need to hear God's word over and over again. We need God's Law to show us our great need for a Savior. We need his gospel remind us what our Lord Jesus has done to save us.

In fact, in today's gospel we see that when it came to persecution, things were no different for Jesus. He told his disciples that he would be rejected by the leaders of the Jews, and that he would suffer and die. And as Jesus spoke that word of God one of his own disciples, Peter, tries to stop him from saying the things God the Father wanted Jesus to say. Jesus was persecuted by his own disciple! Peter tried to get Jesus to stop. But Jesus didn't stop. That persecution he faced was out of love for us. The suffering and death he endured paid for our sinful weakness. Christ paid for our lack of speaking due to fear of persecution. By his cross Christ took away all our sins. By his gospel Jesus has given us faith, forgiveness, hope, and eternal life. And now our Lord calls us to follow in his footsteps. Jesus said, **"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it"** (Mark 8:34-35). The gospel: This is what Jesus has given to us. Just speak what the Lord has given you, knowing that if the world persecuted Jesus for saying these things it will try to persecute us also.

But you don't have to fear that persecution because God will send the help that you need. And quite often that help comes from unlikely sources. For Jeremiah that help came from Ebed-Melech, a Cushite, an official in the royal palace. Cushites came from a region in Southern Egypt. So Ebed-Melech was probably an Ethiopian. What this tells us is that this man was most likely not Jewish by birth. This man had heard Jeremiah's message, and his actions show the courage and faith of someone who believes in the true God. Ebed-Melech goes to the king and points out the evil these men have done to Jeremiah. He persuades the king to change his mind. Then goes and pulls Jeremiah out of that cistern. Someone who was a servant of the king was willing to put his life on the line to save the one being persecuted.

As we proclaim God's word it will do the work for which God sent it. For some people as the law points out their sin they will rebel against God even more. In their anger they will turn on us and persecute us. But as that word goes out, others will be moved by Holy Spirit to repent and believe. As the Word of God works in people's hearts, so often the ones we least expect to help are the people who come to our aid. When we face persecution it might be that co-worker or kid at school, someone who always seems a little distant, that now comes and stands up for us. Or maybe it's that grumpy, old neighbor who always seems to always wear a frown. They hear what you have to say, and they see that you're trying to stand up for what is right, and the next thing we know they are willing to help us.

Although, just because God sends someone to help does not mean our suffering or persecution will end. It didn't end for Jeremiah. Once he was out of the cistern he still wasn't released. He still had to remain under arrest in the courtyard of the temple guard.

Just because someone comes to our aid doesn't mean our persecution or suffering will end. If we stand up for what God says is right, at work we could lose an opportunity for a promotion, or a raise. We could even lose our jobs. If we stand up for what's right at school, we may face the ridicule of teachers, professors, or classmates. If we proclaim God's truth at school or in public we may be shunned, or chastised, or possibly even harmed physically.

But God will send us the help we need. The help God sends may be a person who comes and supports us, letting us know we did the right thing. If we have been hurt financially, or physically, that person may help us with our physical needs. But the help doesn't mean everything will suddenly get better. We may still be out that pay raise. We may still have to deal with the taunts and ridicule of classmates or professors.

In your suffering you can be comforted in this: That God counted you as worthy to suffer those things for the sake of his name. As the Apostle Peter said in our second lesson today, **"However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name"** (1 Peter 4:16). God loves you so much that he is willing to put his name on you. It's true that while we are in this world the name of Jesus brings us persecution and suffering. But if that name is not upon you, if you do not believe

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in Jesus Christ and confess him as your Savior, then you would be eternally damned to the suffering and pain of hell. Without God's name on you, you have no eternal life.

God loves you so much he made you his child, he made you an heir of eternal life, and God has given you the privilege of proclaiming his name to others. God has given each and every one of his believers the high honor of confessing Jesus to the people of this world. We have the honor of taking part in God's plan of salvation.

So, just speak what the Lord has given you. Proclaim the good news of Jesus' salvation whenever and wherever you are able. Confess your Lord and Savior. And when the world persecutes you, know that God will send you the help that you need. You can be certain he will because, **"He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, [...] graciously give us all things?"** (Romans 8:32). Your heavenly Father has already helped you with your greatest need: The forgiveness of your sins. Know that God will also graciously help you when you face suffering and persecution because of his name. One day God will bless you with the greatest relief from all your suffering. As someone who believes and trusts in Jesus, one day the Father will welcome you into the comforting peace of heaven. Amen.