

Jeremiah then returned from Topheth, where the LORD had sent him to prophesy, and stood in the court of the LORD's temple and said to all the people,¹⁵ "This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: 'Listen! I am going to bring on this city and the villages around it every disaster I pronounced against them, because they were stiff-necked and would not listen to my words.' "

^{20:1} When the priest Pashhur son of Immer, the chief officer in the temple of the LORD, heard Jeremiah prophesying these things,² he had Jeremiah the prophet beaten and put in the stocks at the Upper Gate of Benjamin at the LORD's temple.³ The next day, when Pashhur released him from the stocks, Jeremiah said to him, "The LORD's name for you is not Pashhur, but Magor-Missabib.⁴ For this is what the LORD says: 'I will make you a terror to yourself and to all your friends; with your own eyes you will see them fall by the sword of their enemies. I will hand all Judah over to the king of Babylon, who will carry them away to Babylon or put them to the sword.⁵ I will hand over to their enemies all the wealth of this city—all its products, all its valuables and all the treasures of the kings of Judah. They will take it away as plunder and carry it off to Babylon.⁶ And you, Pashhur, and all who live in your house will go into exile to Babylon. There you will die and be buried, you and all your friends to whom you have prophesied lies.' " (Jeremiah 19:14-20:6)

God's Word Prevails

I got an interesting piece of mail this week. It says that according to a 2003 study, "only 9% of professing Christians have a biblical worldview." Now that statistic might not be completely accurate. But my own experience in the ministry has taught me that many Christians do not look at the world the way that the Bible does. What "worldview" do they follow instead? That of the society in which we live. That's no surprise. God designed us to be social creatures. It's natural for us to adopt the outlook of the group that we're part of. Just look at the way your children talk. My kids use lots of words and expressions that they didn't learn from me. God designed us that way on purpose. Being a part of a group means that we have protection and friendship and that we can work together to achieve goals none of us could achieve by ourselves.

But in a sinful world, every gift God gives us gets twisted. Unbelievers dominate every society so the outlook of the people around us is always going to lead us away from Christ. We are at war for as long as we live here. We parents are at war for the hearts and minds of our children. Our society wants to steal them from us and from the Church. Every man, woman and child in this building is at war to preserve our own faith. And on our own, we can only lose. We can only become mindless clones of the godless society around us. But my friends, we are not on our own. Today, the prophet Jeremiah shows us that. His life and words teach us something we already know: **God's Word prevails.**

I.

Jeremiah lived at the worst moment in Israel's history. He was born into the most unfaithful generation in all of Scripture. He lived through the fall of Jerusalem and the slaughter that followed. He watched most of the survivors dragged away to exile in Babylon. Jeremiah was the lone voice calling God's people to return to him before that disaster struck. If you can imagine preaching that homosexuality is a sin at a gay pride parade in San Francisco, if you can imagine telling a convention of the National Organization of Women that God does not want women to be pastors, if you can imagine addressing a gathering of Hollywood directors and writers and telling them that God wants them to take all the smut out of TV and movies, you might have an idea of what Jeremiah's ministry was like.

Israel had turned their backs on the Lord. They had embraced the false gods of the people around them. Right outside of Jerusalem at place called Topheth, they sacrificed their firstborn children to Baal. God sent Jeremiah to Topheth, right to the heart of this horrible cult, to proclaim God's wrath to the people gathered there to celebrate killing their own infants. Our text for today picks up when he came back to Jerusalem to make sure that the people in the city couldn't say, "Well, we weren't out there sacrificing our children. It's not our fault." God said that he was going to bring on Jerusalem and on all the surrounding villages every disaster he had promised because they were stiff-necked. They were too stubborn to repent.

What disasters had God promised? Death and destruction. Starvation and plagues. The few who survived would never return home. What do you think of that warning? Does it seem to you like this Old

Testament God is a God of vengeance and that he has very little to do with the God of love that you've come to know in the New Testament? Many people draw that conclusion. But don't be deceived, my friends. This is our God talking. Death and destruction, punishment and terror – the New Testament God promises worse things than these because he threatens to send his enemies to hell.

The people needed to hear this law because God deals with us in terms of law and gospel. That law is essential to God's love because you cannot understand his forgiveness until you understand how terrible our sin is. God demands that we put him first in our lives. When believers turn their backs on God, his law says that they will be punished. God does condemn sinners to hell. But at the same time, God longs to forgive them. God longs to give eternal life to every person who ever has lived and ever will live. So he satisfied his law by sending Jesus to fulfill the law in our place. Jesus Christ was the only true and faithful worshipper of God who ever lived. Every one of us is an idol worshipper by nature and even after we come to faith, we still worship other gods. Every time we sin, we worship our sinful desires instead of our Lord. So, if it's true that 91% of all professing Christians don't have a biblical worldview, then it's true that 91% of Christians worship the society we live in.

Do you let God's Word dictate your view of life? What's your attitude toward sex and marriage and living together? God says that sexual relations are for one man and one woman who are already married to each other. Living together is a sin. Having sex with someone you're been dating is a sin even if you love each other. Do you agree with God or do you dismiss what he says because people today think differently? God's Word says that our money is a trust from him and he calls us to make a joyful and generous gift to him before we pay for our other needs. Do you do that? Or do you give God what's leftover? Our society says that money is yours and you should only give it to the church when they prove they deserve it. But God says you're not giving to the church, you're giving to him. Does his word take our thoughts captive or do we worship the more reasonable approach of our time? God's Word says that we should avoid all false teaching. We should worship only in churches that proclaim the truth. Do you put his word first in your life, or do you frequent the evangelical bookstores, which have little understanding of the gospel? Do you worship here and somewhere else – somewhere more exciting, somewhere less Lutheran? Our society would be appalled that I would dare to suggest that it's wrong for you to worship somewhere else.

Any time we put what our society says ahead of what God says, we are doing exactly the same thing that Israel was doing when they went out to Topheth and sacrificed their babies to a false god. We're worshipping the false god of American culture. We deserve death and hell. We sinners need to hear that. We need to feel uncomfortable. But now that God has struck our hearts and we are desperate for peace, that's exactly what God gives us through Jesus. Jesus worshipped God in our place. He rejected his unbelieving society and clung to God's Word in perfect faith. The Word of the Lord dominated all that he thought and felt. It determined all that he said and did.

Jesus' perfect life counts for us. God calls us perfect because Jesus was. And God calls us perfect because Jesus went to cross for us. He let sinners torture him and nail him to that cross. He let them mock and abuse him to pay for our sins. But you know what? All that wasn't enough. We needed more than nails and scourging. We deserve more pain than hanging on a cross gasping for breath while our enemies mock us. Our idol worship deserves hell. Jesus suffered that on the cross too. Then he died. He bought and paid for us. Then Jesus rose to tell that our idol worship is gone. God has wiped it out of his records.

That word of forgiveness prevails in our lives. It conquers our unbelief and gives us faith and hope. It crushes our guilt and assures us that we belong to God. Even in this country that can't wait to find new ways to deny what God has said, the Word of the Lord is still the most powerful force in the universe. It still breaks the hearts of hardened sinners and teaches them to trust in Jesus. It did that for you and me! **God's word prevails over the idolatry of our time.**

II.

God called Jeremiah to speak his word to people who didn't want to hear it. An important official in the temple, and therefore in the government, named Pashhur "thanked" him by having him beaten and locked in stocks overnight! You see, Pashhur kept saying that God was going to save the country. He didn't want to hear the truth. His friends wanted to hear what made them feel good. The next day, when Pashhur came to let Jeremiah out of the stocks, he heard one more prophecy from the Lord: everything that he feared was going to happen. He would see his friends and family killed or dragged off to captivity. His country would fall and

Pashhur himself would go to Babylon and die there. All the people who had listened to him say that it would all be OK, would see just how wrong he was.

Pashhur would have time in Babylon to reflect on his sin. God was giving him time to repent. That shows just how much our God loves us. He even uses the consequences of our sins to call us to turn us back to him. Have you had to live with the consequences of sinful words and actions? Do you look back on a failed marriage and regret all the ways that you didn't love and honor your spouses? Do you look back on a life without Christ and feel sorrow for the things you did? Do you have to live with the consequences of those sins? My friends, Christ applies to you as well. God, who knows us and loves us, may determine that we have to live with the consequences of our sins. That marriage may never be restored. Some hurts or losses may never be repaired in this life. And our hearts may never stop condemning us. But God has stopped. Even if the people we hurt can never forgive us, God has wiped those sins away with the blood of Christ. God has declared us to be holy and righteous and he promises that even in the ruins of our lives here, he will be with us. He will comfort us. And when we leave this life, we will be free from all the consequences of our sin. We will be free from guilt and our hearts will finally be at perfect peace. We will rest in the Lord forever.

We don't know if Pashhur repented. But he was not the only person there that day. Jeremiah was there, too. And he had just spent the night bruised and bloodied from a beating. He was stiff from those stocks and it would've been easy for him to walk away bitter and beaten. But God promised him that in the end, the Word of the Lord would win. That is still true today. Sometimes it's hard to see that. During that long night, Jeremiah couldn't see what God was doing. When we stand up for what God says, we can expect the unbelievers to punish us for it. We can expect that important religious people like Pashhur will call us names like "fundamentalist" and "fanatic." We can expect that people will distant themselves from us. Even family members may pressure us to drop our hard nosed stand and get with the times. Sometimes, we can't see what God is doing.

But faith is trusting God's promises even when all the evidence of our eyes and our ears and the taste of blood in our mouths indicate that God has forgotten us. Faith trusts that God is taking care of us even when common sense says it's time to compromise because standing up to people who are stronger than we are is only going to hurt. God will not abandon us. In this life, the Holy Spirit may bring those who torment us to repent and perhaps we'll even hear an apology from them. Or, if their hearts remain hard, they themselves may suffer God's discipline in this life. But then again, they may not. They may live their whole lives in comfort and popularity and it may all seem to be totally unfair.

But remember, my friends, all that God gives us is grace. We deserve nothing of his love, not even vindication for being faithful. And the end is near. On Judgment Day, every enemy of Christ will fall on their knees and acknowledge him as Lord and Savior. Then they'll go to hell. On that day, when Jesus invites us to live with him forever, we won't care how hard it was to get there. We will see clearly what we don't see now. We will marvel at how God loved us every moment of our lives, even when he let his enemies punish us for being faithful. We will share Jesus' victory. **God's Word prevails over the opposition of our society.**

There are three great enemies to our faith: the devil, the world and our sinful flesh. Each one has different weapons. Our sinful flesh has the great weapon of proximity. It's very close to us. We can't ever get away from it. The devil has the weapon of potency. He's powerful. He's a roaring lion seeking to devour us. And the unbelieving world around has the weapon of ubiquity. It's everywhere all the time. There is no medium, no writing, no person whom the unbelief of our society does not touch. But Jesus is greater than all of our enemies. He defeated them all when he died and rose. His word cannot fail. It triumphs over them all. And we will win in the end. Amen.