

“Believing the Word of Promise”

Text: Jeremiah 26:8-15

Abraham is a noted figure in three of the world’s most significant religions: Christianity, Judaism and Islam. God said to him-“Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to a land I will show you.” (Genesis 12:1) God promised to make him great and the father of many nations. He promised him a son in his old age and later asked him to sacrifice his son.

In the New Testament St. Paul says of him: “Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness.” (Romans 4:3) He believed the word that God had spoken to him and it guided him throughout his life. Even though some of these promises were quite unusual, and we would say impossible, still God kept his word and promise to him.

Jeremiah, living some time later was called as a young man to be a prophet. He thought he was not up to the challenge but God said: “Do not say ‘I am only a youth’, for to all whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you.” (Jeremiah 1:4-5) The lesson was learned well by the prophet Jeremiah. He brought a message of judgment from God to his people. He was facing execution, but he did not shrink from his responsibility. He faithfully brought God’s word and did not worry about his own life, but carried out his calling as God’s spokesman. Like Jeremiah we are called to be faithful and have God’s promise to us as we are active in-

BELIEVING THE WORD OF PROMISE

I. Which God speaks

II. Which calls for our faithfulness

I.

A.1. Whatever Jeremiah said, he really had the people upset with him even to the point of death. This is an often repeated theme in the Old Testament. People protect their traditions and their leaders, but do not want to hear what God has to say. The message was simple: stop following your ways and follow me. If they did not want to follow God, their city and temple would be destroyed. God made a comparison with Shiloh. At one time it had been a religious center, but because it did not follow God it was destroyed. The ruins were still standing in Jeremiah's day, so it would be an effective object lesson for them.

2. While Jeremiah's message was unpopular with the people, he was faithfully carrying out his commission from God. In the epistle lesson for today, St. Paul refers to the people of his day and says: "Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things." (Philippians 3:19) That can speak to the people of our text as well and of course people today.

B.1. The word Jeremiah proclaimed was the word of God applied to the lives of his people. Throughout Jeremiah there is an appeal to hear words that are worthwhile. He told Jeremiah, "If you return, I will restore you, and you shall stand before me. If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, you shall be as my mouth. They shall turn to you, but you shall not turn to them." (Jeremiah 15:19)

This is the message of the church today as well. As is seen in the life of Jeremiah, it does not ensure popularity, but that is not its purpose. People claim affiliation with churches for services rendered (Baptism, Marriage, Funeral) but not an ongoing relationship. So what happens when people are told of God's desire for them, they become resentful. Isaiah tells us, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—everyone—to his own way."

(Isaiah 53:6) that is the nature of sinfulness.

2. Threaten as they might, this would not change Jeremiah's message because it was a message from God. Their threats toward Jeremiah would not change the word of God. Jeremiah could be killed, but that would change nothing. That is the history of God's people. Jesus said it himself in our Gospel lesson: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!" (Luke 13:34) Killing Jeremiah would not change what God wanted from his people and that was lives that followed Him and His word.

II.

A.1. While the words of Jeremiah look rather bleak, God has something better in mind for them. In verse 3, God says, "Do not hold back a word. It may be they will listen, and everyone turn from his evil way, that I may relent of the disaster that I intend to do to them because of their evil deeds." A similar thought is brought forward in verse 13 of our text. Out of concern God wants them to change their ways and listen to Him. This preaching of the Law and this is the reason why you and I need to hear it. Our sins are serious and God wants us to see that and to receive the good He has in mind for us.

2. Instead of His strict judgment, God would rather bestow his blessing. Earlier in this prophecy God said: "Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail." (Jeremiah 7:8) False promises are always around, but they do not have the welfare of God's people at heart. Only God and his promise can do that. He calls us to be faithful to Him because of His great love to us in Jesus Christ. He calls for faithfulness from us, because He has been faithful to us first.

B.1. Jeremiah's promise was that if the people repented and listened to God's word once again and followed it, He would not deliver the destruction that He had threatened. It is His great promise of love that He still holds out to us today. This is not something that we deserve, but that God gives freely to us.

At one time there was a mother who approached the great general Napoleon Bonaparte. She was pleading for the life of her son. The young soldier had fallen asleep at his post. His punishment was to be execution. The mother pleaded for Napoleon to change his ruling of the death penalty. He responded, "But that would not be justice!" She replied, "But I am not pleading for justice, Sir, I am pleading for mercy." Justice is what we deserve from God, but mercy is what we receive in Christ. That is God's promise to us and what He wants us to hear.

What was promised, God would one day deliver. What was impossible for His people to do, God himself would do. In chapter 31 of Jeremiah: "And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." (Jeremiah 31:34)

As we have begun this Lenten season, we remember how God delivered us. Our sin is serious and it cost Him the life of His only Son. He expects obedience and faithfulness from us, but He had given the greatest promise of all in our Savior Jesus Christ. Lent calls attention to our sins and our need to repent. It also reminds us of Him who paid the greatest price of all—His life given for us. It is the greatest promise of all and one we believe! In Jesus' name. Amen.