**June 21, 2020 Jeremiah 20:7-13**

***A Fire Within***

**Scripture:** Jeremiah 20:7-13 NRSV

*(7)O LORD, you have enticed me, and I was enticed; you have overpowered me, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all day long; everyone mocks me. (8)For whenever I speak, I must cry out, I must shout, "Violence and destruction!" For the word of the LORD has become for me a reproach and derision all day long. (9)If I say, "I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name," then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot. (10)For I hear many whispering: "Terror is all around! Denounce him! Let us denounce him!" All my close friends are watching for me to stumble. "Perhaps he can be enticed, and we can prevail against him, and take our revenge on him." (11)But the LORD is with me like a dread warrior; therefore my persecutors will stumble, and they will not prevail. They will be greatly shamed, for they will not succeed. Their eternal dishonor will never be forgotten. (12)O LORD of hosts, you test the righteous, you see the heart and the mind; let me see your retribution upon them, for to you I have committed my cause. (13)Sing to the LORD; praise the LORD! For he has delivered the life of the needy from the hands of evildoers.*

**Notes:**

1. Jeremiah speaks with the Lord, ***spilling*** his guts.
   1. Jeremiah feels like the Lord has ***deceived*** him into making a fool of himself.
   2. Jeremiah is ***regretting*** his obedience to God’s will.
   3. Jeremiah is ***thinking***; I am done doing what you tell me to do, Lord.
   4. Jeremiah hears the ***whispers*** of the people.
   5. Jeremiahs train of thought changes. Lord, you are a ***mighty*** ***warrior***.
2. Jeremiah is very ***discouraged***.
   1. Witnessing for Jesus Christ is ***offensive*** to those who do not know Jesus personally.
   2. Persecution and discouragement have no ***power*** or ***authority*** in the presence of God.
   3. God’s ***message*** demands full expression
   4. God will ***protect*** and see us through to victory.
3. The Lord will ***test*** those who do right.
   1. When was the last time you were really ***honest*** with the Lord?
   2. When was the last time you felt that ***burning*** in your soul?
   3. Be encouraged to ***spread*** the gospel of Jesus Christ.
   4. Fear is ***faith*** turned inside-out.
   5. Realize the ***fire*** that God has put within you.

**Transcript:**

I have shared with you so many times about the failures and shortcomings of my life. About the many times I have failed to achieve and accomplish what I have set out to do. Many times, these examples I use are from my short lived sports career. Other times may come from my teaching career and the rest come from the many times in my life when I made mistakes, or came up short of what I intended to achieve. But when I look back at these moments and think about how foolish I felt, how immature I may have acted, I realize that these blunders do not define me. What defines me is what I do after the blunder.

Each of us have made mistakes, some times in the midst of competition, whether it is athletic competition, or scholastic competition; we have all had moments where we feel as if we have failed. But when we look back on these moments later on, we see that those moments do not define us but it is how we respond to these events that defines who we are

Today we are looking into the life of Jeremiah. You may turn with me to the 20th chapter and we will begin with verses 7-13. Here we are seeing how Jeremiah responds to one of those moments, you know the ones I am talking about, a moment where Jeremiah did his best and felt as if he was a failure. Jeremiah had been prophesying about the destruction of Jerusalem. The chief priest Pashhur heard of these prophecies. Pashhur had Jeremiah beaten, and imprisoned. Upon his release, Jeremiah confronted Pashhur, “The Lord will make you a terror to yourself. Pashhur, you and everybody in your house will be taken to Babylon… where you and all of your household will die and be buried. Our passage begins immediately after this confrontation.

Jeremiah 20:7-13 NRSV (7)O LORD, you have enticed me, and I was enticed; you have overpowered me, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all day long; everyone mocks me. (8)For whenever I speak, I must cry out, I must shout, "Violence and destruction!" For the word of the LORD has become for me a reproach and derision all day long. (9)If I say, "I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name," then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot. (10)For I hear many whispering: "Terror is all around! Denounce him! Let us denounce him!" All my close friends are watching for me to stumble. "Perhaps he can be enticed, and we can prevail against him, and take our revenge on him." (11)But the LORD is with me like a dread warrior; therefore my persecutors will stumble, and they will not prevail. They will be greatly shamed, for they will not succeed. Their eternal dishonor will never be forgotten. (12)O LORD of hosts, you test the righteous, you see the heart and the mind; let me see your retribution upon them, for to you I have committed my cause. (13)Sing to the LORD; praise the LORD! For he has delivered the life of the needy from the hands of evildoers.

It doesn’t say this but I envision Jeremiah stealing away to a secluded place. Here Jeremiah may speak with the Lord alone. And that is what Jeremiah does, only it is more like spilling his guts. All of the emotion that Jeremiah has left build up inside of him is now flooding from his mouth like word vomit. “Lord you have enticed me and I was enticed.” Jeremiah feels like the Lord has deceived him into making a fool of himself. Jeremiah had told the people what the Lord had said and in return he is beaten, imprisoned, and made to look foolish. Of the three I get the feeling the latter was the worst for Jeremiah. Getting a beating for doing the will of God is noble; being imprisoned for doing what God tells you is honorable; but being made to look foolish is something that nobody desires, it is neither noble, nor honorable; it is downright foolish. “Everyone is laughing at me.”

Jeremiah is regretting his obedience to God’s will, because every time he does what the Lord says, he feels as if others find him foolish. Jeremiah becomes very emotional in the delivery of the message, he cries out, he is loud, and in some cases, may be viewed as a little crazy. To be very honest Jeremiah had a reputation of being maybe the first holy roller.

Jeremiah is thinking; I am done doing what you tell me to do, Lord. But then the Lord’s message comes to him and the message burns within him in such a way that he cannot suppress it. The message has to be shared or he feels as if he is going to explode. Jeremiah says he is tired of holding it back, in fact he cannot hold it back.

Jeremiah then shares that he hears the whispers of the people around him. “There is terror on every side”; “We should report Him to the authorities.” Jeremiah sounds a little paranoid doesn’t he? All of my friends are waiting for me to make a mistake, they are conspiring to overtake him, to have him put away. But the truth be told isn’t this the way people think when they do not understand the messenger, when they do not like the message. When people are intimidated, they tend to talk in whispers, they talk behind your back, they talk about revenge, and talk about somebody else handling the situation, doing the dirty work.

And then all of a sudden Jeremiahs train of thought changes. It is as if He makes a great realization. Lord, you are a mighty warrior; those who mean harm for me will not succeed, they will trip and fall; they will not be permitted to victor over me; they will fail and be put to shame, and this failure and shame will never be forgotten. Jeremiah continues to lift the Lord in praise; Lord, you rule over all things; You test us; You see in our hearts and minds; and, then Jeremiah asks the Lord to defend him and pay the others back for their ways. I have committed my cause to you. And he continues to reign praise and glory down upon the Lord; encouraging others to do the same.

When we look at this passage, what do we see, what do we hear, and what can we learn? Jeremiah is very discouraged. He has dedicated his welfare to serving the Lord and in return he is beaten, he is imprisoned, he is laughed at and mocked, most likely being made fun of by his closest friends, he is criticized, and people do not like the message he has come to share. So he begins his pity party.

Have you ever been there? Have you ever tried to do your best to do what the Lord is calling you to do, only to be persecuted, ridiculed, and vilified? It is no fun to be doing the Lord’s work and have others ridiculing it; it is no fun to be doing the Lord’s work and then thrown in jail for it; and, it is no fun to be doing the Lord’s work only to be beaten up because of it. Have your friends whispered behind your back because of something that you did? Then you probably know the feelings that Jeremiah is feeling in this passage.

When it comes to religion and especially ministering in the name of Jesus Christ, it still can make us cringe, if not raise the hair on the back of our necks, when we hear others use words and phrases like “tolerance,” “inclusiveness,” “sensitivity,” and “religious pluralism,” “Black Lives Matter,” and “White Privilege.”

The world is no different today than it has been for past societies, generations, or time eras in the history of humanity. The fact is clear: witnessing and ministering for Jesus Christ is difficult, challenging, and offensive to those who do not know Jesus personally. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1:18, “the message about the cross doesn’t make any sense to lost people. But for those of us who are being saved, it is God’s power at work.” (CEV) Simply put, our society will go overboard to ensure that we don’t “offend” anyone with our words, actions and religion; especially if that “religion” is Christian faith. Paul knew first-hand the cost of being an outspoken ambassador for Jesus Christ. He said in 1 Corinthians 4:10-13, “we are fools for Christ …to this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless… When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.”

Does it sound familiar? Is this the world we live in today? It can get discouraging, lonely, and even scary at times when we share our faith in Jesus Christ only to have others not only reject it, but threaten us, laugh at us, or scold us for the message we bring to them. It can be surprising as to why anyone would reject something that is so wonderful and why they can walk away from an offering of hope, joy, love, peace, forgiveness, wholeness, and eternal life in God’s kingdom. Dealing with this almost all the time, one could come to the conclusion that there’s really no point in sharing the gospel anymore because people, our society, and our world have become so secularized in their thinking and understanding of God. It has gotten to the point that it even seems that the world has become hostile towards not only Jesus, but Christians in general.

No amount of persecution and no depth of discouragement could hold back the power of God working in and through Jeremiah. Persecution and discouragement have no power or authority in the presence of God. The word of God wouldn’t stay put within Jeremiah any longer. He soon found out that he could not deny his mission to be one of God’s prophets. He could not deny his call he found no other satisfaction than to be sharing God’s message he was not able to be satisfied as a hermit, silenced and secluded, but he was fulfilled preaching God’s truth.

Jeremiah ran into an undeniable reality: it is just as dangerous not to go when called by the Lord as it is to run without being called. Jeremiah was wearing himself out trying to withdraw and remain silent. God’s message demands full expression in spite of persecution, opposition and mockery. So great was this compelling force of the revelation, that Jeremiah never once doubted its reality. He returned to his calling. The same is true for us! It is simply a fact of being a follower of Jesus Christ that we will face opposition for our support of God’s truth.

Matthew 5:11-12 “"*blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you*.” Whatever we may face, we can stand assured that with our faith firmly rooted in God, he will protect and see us through to victory in any storm or adversity.

2 Corinthians 4:8-10, “*we are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body*.” God has given us his promise that if we will stand up for him amongst division, persecution, rejection, and evil, he would give us victory that overcomes the world.

1 john 5:3-5, “this is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the son of God. Many of God’s called servants in the bible battled the discouragement of opposition and persecution. Elijah fled from Jezebel, Jonah escaped to Tarshish, Moses trying to lead the Israelites, and Paul and Silas falsely punished for preaching the gospel. In many of the accounts we find in scripture we see that not only a price was paid for obedience to God’s calling, but an adjustment in attitude was greatly made to stand firm and stand strong amongst threats of adversity.

Are any of us discouraged today? Jeremiah said that he was ready to quit. But he also said that the Lord will test those who do right; and the Lord knows every heart and mind. Nobody fools the Lord, he knows our thoughts and desires. Jeremiah told the Lord exactly what he was feeling, and asked the Lord to pay the others back for what they had done.

How do you respond to this type of adversity? Do we feel as if all of your efforts are in vain? Are you tired of rejection? Do you feel like you want quit; or maybe you want to just sit back and let somebody else do all the work.

When was the last time: you told the Lord how you really felt… you bared your soul and asked God for the true desire of your heart… you were really honest with the Lord… you realized your shortcomings and confessed them to Him… you really listened to what the Lord wanted from you?

When was the last time you felt that burning in your soul? We sang the song Soul on Fire earlier in the service? Have you listened to the words closely: *God I’m running for your heart, til I am a soul on fire; Lord I’m longing for your ways, til I am a soul on fire; Lord restore the joy I had, I have wondered, bring me back: In this darkness lead me through, until all I see is you. Lord, let me burn for you again, Lord, let me return to you again.* This song is a prayer for revival, renewal, restoration. I do not know what you need today, nor what you desire in your heart; but I am sure that if you prayed this prayer from your heart, over and over again, you would begin to feel the fire of the Holy Spirit burning within you. Don’t stop praying this prayer until you feel that fire.

My desire is for you to leave this service today, feeling that fire burning within you. Let us all leave here encouraged and renewed in our mission to keep spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ no matter what. Let us find our relief in this fight knowing that the battle is not ours, but God’s. 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, “for though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.”(ESV)

That is why I leave you with the words of God, given to us through Jahaziel in 2 chronicles 20:15-17, “…this is what the lord says: ‘do not be afraid! Don’t be discouraged…, for the battle is not yours, but God’s. …you will not even need to fight. Take your positions; then stand still and watch the lord’s victory. He is with you…do not be afraid or discouraged. Go out tomorrow, for the lord is with you!”

Fear is nothing more than faith turned inside-out. Allow God to empower you to share your faith, not only more often, but with new-found power and boldness. Remember: the key to effective witnessing is not a responsive audience but the word of God burning within us. Allow God to enflame your heart once again with the passion to spread the good news of Jesus Christ! Realize the Fire that God has put within you to do what He is calling you to do.