

# *“Feel Like Quitting?”*

JEREMIAH 20

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For just a few moments, I would like for us to ask ourselves whether we have ever been so discouraged doing the right thing that we have felt like giving up? While telling someone about God’s plan, have we ever been so abused or so ignored that we have been tempted to just skip it? Have we ever just backed away from an opportunity to share our faith because we are so disgusted concerning how the situation is progressing? I don’t know whether you have ever been in that situation, but I would up that just a notch: Have we ever been so discouraged by the rejection of our message that we wish we had never been born? I don’t know about you, but for me, I have never been so discouraged to the point of wishing that I had never been born. I have been chased down the street by a screaming man. My life has been threatened. I have had doors slammed in my face. I have had a man angrily throw his shoes across my living room as my infant son slept in an adjoining room. As a congregation, we have been threatened with a lawsuit by a national atheist organization over the fact that we used to meet for worship in a public elementary school. But personally, I have never been so discouraged to the point of wishing that I had never been born. However, in the Bible, we do read about a prophet who was in that situation. I am referring to the prophet Jeremiah.

Now, as I think about the fact that most of us have probably never been rejected and discouraged to the point that Jeremiah was discouraged. Why are we not persecuted as men like Jeremiah were? I see two possibilities: First of all, it is possible that we are preaching with the power and spirit of Jeremiah but that the world around us just isn’t as bad today as it was back then. Or secondly, our world really is as bad as it was back then, but we are no longer preaching and teaching with the fire and passion of the prophets like Jeremiah. To me, both of those possibilities are rather disturbing. Either our world has the potential to get a lot worse, or we are not preaching and teaching with the passion and clarity that God requires. We think of the apostle Paul’s promise in 2 Timothy 3:12 where he told the young preacher Timothy, ***“Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”*** So, the question in the back of my mind is this: If we are not being persecuted to the extent of Jeremiah and some of the early Christians, then why not? I just want us to keep that question in mind this morning as we study a rather disturbing passage from the book of Jeremiah – Jeremiah 20.

To put the prophet Jeremiah in context, we need to know that God sent this man to preach to the Southern Kingdom of Israel, and he was sent to preach in a situation where the nation as a whole was basically already beyond the point of no return. The nation was so far gone, even to the point where the punishment was basically coming no matter what. Jeremiah, then, was called on to preach in those closing years of the

kingdom leading up to the Babylonian Captivity. Above all, I would have to say that Jeremiah was a man of courage. He lived during the last days of a decomposing nation, and he was given the responsibility of preaching God's word into that situation. In Jeremiah 19, God had Jeremiah go to a pottery shop to purchase a jar, he was to take that jar to a meeting of the religious leaders, and he was to use that jar as a graphic illustration. Jeremiah obeyed the voice of the Lord and brought a message of doom and destruction: These are the things that you have done – you have forsaken God, you have offered sacrifices to other gods, you have killed your own children – and because of this, this nation will fall – you will die by the sword, and your cities will be attacked and surrounded to the point where you will be so hungry that you will eat your own children. That is the message Jeremiah delivered, and then as if to put an exclamation point after that message, he smashed the jar on the ground and said, "This is what God will do to you" (paraphrased)!

And with that, we come to our text for this morning – Jeremiah 20, a passage where the religious leaders react and Jeremiah is actually physically persecuted for the very first time. If we could put ourselves in his situation, we could probably understand something of what he was thinking – maybe a little bit disillusioned. As a young man, this probably was not the way he intended on spending his life, bringing these harsh messages from God and getting beat up in the process. And yet, as we learned in our scripture reading this morning, God had a plan for Jeremiah's life, even before he was born. Even in his mother's womb, God saw Jeremiah and said, "That man right there will speak on my behalf" (paraphrased). ***"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations"*** (Jeremiah 1:5). Today, we might be surprised that our Christian journey may not be taking the route we first expected, but as we study Jeremiah 20 this morning, I want us to keep our eyes open: How do we react when our walk with God takes an unexpected turn?

So, in chapter 19, Jeremiah brings a message of doom and destruction, and we pick up with Jeremiah 20,

***When Pashhur the priest, the son of Immer, who was chief officer in the house of the Lord, heard Jeremiah prophesying these things, Pashhur had Jeremiah the prophet beaten and put him in the stocks that were at the upper Benjamin Gate, which was by the house of the Lord. On the next day, when Pashhur released Jeremiah from the stocks, Jeremiah said to him, "Pashhur is not the name the Lord has called you, but rather Magor-missabib. For thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I am going to make you a terror to yourself and to all your friends; and while your eyes look on, they will fall by the sword of their enemies. So I will give over all Judah to the hand of the king of Babylon, and he will carry them away as exiles to Babylon and will slay them with the sword. I will also give over all the wealth of this city, all its produce and all its costly things; even all the treasures of the kings of Judah I will give over to the hand of their enemies, and they will plunder them, take them away and bring them to Babylon. And you, Pashhur, and all who live in your house will go into captivity; and you will enter Babylon, and there you will die and there you will be buried, you and all your friends to whom you have falsely prophesied.'"***

***O Lord, You have deceived me and I was deceived;  
You have overcome me and prevailed.  
I have become a laughingstock all day long;  
Everyone mocks me.  
For each time I speak, I cry aloud;  
I proclaim violence and destruction,  
Because for me the word of the Lord has resulted***

*In reproach and derision all day long.  
 But if I say, "I will not remember Him  
 Or speak anymore in His name,"  
 Then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire  
 Shut up in my bones;  
 And I am weary of holding it in,  
 And I cannot endure it.  
 For I have heard the whispering of many,  
 "Terror on every side!  
 Denounce him; yes, let us denounce him!"  
 All my trusted friends,  
 Watching for my fall, say:  
 "Perhaps he will be deceived, so that we may prevail against him  
 And take our revenge on him."  
 But the Lord is with me like a dread champion;  
 Therefore my persecutors will stumble and not prevail.  
 They will be utterly ashamed, because they have failed,  
 With an everlasting disgrace that will not be forgotten.  
 Yet, O Lord of hosts, You who test the righteous,  
 Who see the mind and the heart;  
 Let me see Your vengeance on them;  
 For to You I have set forth my cause.  
 Sing to the Lord, praise the Lord!  
 For He has delivered the soul of the needy one  
 From the hand of evildoers.*

*Cursed be the day when I was born;  
 Let the day not be blessed when my mother bore me!  
 Cursed be the man who brought the news  
 To my father, saying,  
 "A baby boy has been born to you!"  
 And made him very happy.  
 But let that man be like the cities  
 Which the Lord overthrew without relenting,  
 And let him hear an outcry in the morning  
 And a shout of alarm at noon;  
 Because he did not kill me before birth,  
 So that my mother would have been my grave,  
 And her womb ever pregnant.  
 Why did I ever come forth from the womb  
 To look on trouble and sorrow,  
 So that my days have been spent in shame?*

As we look at what happened here, let us please consider just a few very simple ideas that we can apply to our own lives when we are tempted to get discouraged or disillusioned in our Christian faith.

I. **The first idea I'd like to point out here is this: As we preach and teach, as we share our Christian faith with others, WE ARE TO EXPECT OPPOSITION.**

In other words, if we are speaking up for God as we should, then we might as well just get ready to take some heat for saying what we need to say. I remember reading about one minister asking another minister, "So, how many of your members are ACTIVE in the church?" The minister responded by saying, "All of them are active – half of them actively support me and half of them actively oppose me!" Jeremiah could have empathized with that man! And sometimes, as was the case with Jeremiah, the opposition comes from those who should be our strongest supporters. Sometimes the opposition comes from our closest friends. Sometimes the opposition comes from those who also claim to be following God. We think of what happened in the opening verses of Jeremiah 20, our text for this morning. We read about a man named Pashur the priest, the son of the chief officer in the temple. Here was a man who should have been Jeremiah's closest ally. In fact, if Pashur had accepted Jeremiah's message, if Pashur had said, "Yes, Jeremiah is right. As a nation we have been offering our own children on the pagan altars, and we need to change," if Pashur had said that, he could have been a national hero. Pashur could have been the man to turn back God's wrath that was about to be unleashed through the Babylonian assault on the Southern Kingdom of Israel. There is no soldier on the battlefield and no politician in ancient Israel who could have done more to save the nation than Pashur at this critical moment. After all, Jeremiah was not creating this situation. Jeremiah was not causing the coming destruction. Jeremiah was simply bringing God's word into the situation and warning about what was about to happen. Pashur, then, could have been a national hero by getting on board with the truth. And yet instead of supporting Jeremiah as he should have done, we find that Pashur has Jeremiah physically beaten and placed in the stocks as a form of public humiliation and torture, in an attempt to discredit God's chosen messenger.

Why? Why would Pashur have done such a thing? We are not given the reason in this passage, but if we read elsewhere in the Bible, we find that many of the priests and religious leaders were corrupt. Many of them had been bought and paid for. Some were even bringing messages from the enemy and claiming that those messages came from God. So, money might have played a role here, but we also have the unpleasant truth that truth hurts. When a nation is corrupt, people usually don't want to hear about it. In our own nation, most people don't want to think about the fact that more than 56 million children have been murdered since the Roe vs. Wade decision back in 1973. That is a national embarrassment (or at least it should be), and we need to be speaking out on it. If I could take just a little detour here (a positive detour): I want to tell you about a phone call I got on the church line just a few days ago. A young woman called and wanted to talk. She said that she had recently divorced her husband because he had been unfaithful, she has several children, she is now in a new relationship with a boyfriend, and she just discovered that she is expecting. Her message to me was, "I can't handle this! What do I do?" We had a discussion about the love and grace of God. I referred her to CareNet one of our local pro-life organizations that offers help and support and free ultrasounds and counseling and even a place to stay to young women contemplating abortion. I gave her the number, I told her that my wife and I have supported this group in the past, and she promised to call immediately. I believe we saved a life this past Monday morning. But of course, my greatest concern was with this woman's soul, and so I urged her to join us for worship. With tears in her voice, she said, "But I would not be welcome in any church building." I said, "I guarantee that you will be welcome at the Four Lakes congregation." In a culture of death, however, our message is increasingly seen as hostile. We think of the controversy several months ago when CareNet applied for some tax breaks to offer more low-income housing. A majority of those on the city council were outraged, "How dare you offer a pro-life message in Madison, Wisconsin!" We live in a world that is increasingly hostile to the Christian faith. Jeremiah would encourage us, though, based on his own personal experience, that we are to expect opposition. When we reach out with the gospel message, we will face resistance.

Did Jeremiah tone down his message? Absolutely not! On the next day, when he was released from the stocks, Jeremiah went immediately to Pashur and renamed him, ***“Terror on Every Side.”*** Jeremiah then continued preaching that this man and his family and all of his friends would fall by the sword and that they would be buried in a far off land. In verse 4, by the way, we have the first reference to ***“Babylon”*** in the book of Jeremiah. So, not only does Jeremiah not back down, but the prophecy gets even more specific than it was before. We learn from Jeremiah, then, that when we speak the truth as we should, we are to expect opposition. What can we do this morning to avoid being a Pashur? We can support the preaching of the truth. What can we do to be more like Jeremiah? We can speak up, knowing that there will be opposition. We cannot face opposition if we fail to speak up.

**II. There is a second lesson we learn from this chapter, and that is: When we face opposition, we see in Jeremiah an example of CONFESSING OUR FRUSTRATION TO THE LORD.**

From time to time, we will study prayer here at this congregation, and when we study prayer, we often say that we need to start our prayers with some kind of praise, some kind of acknowledgement concerning how great God is, ***“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name,”*** and that’s great, of course. But did you notice how Jeremiah started his prayer in verse 7 (after spending all night in the stocks), ***“O Lord, You have deceived me and I was deceived; You have overcome me and prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all day long; everyone mocks me.”*** Did you catch the praise in that verse? I didn’t! And the reason is: Jeremiah is overwhelmed with frustration over this situation. He has done everything God told him to do, but life was not going well!

Have we ever been in that situation? I know that we are not Jeremiah, but there are times when we are also frustrated, and there are times when we also might need to just dump it all out on the Lord. Peter, in fact (in 1 Peter 5:7), tells us that we should ***“...cast[ing] all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.”*** There are times when we just need to dump something on the Lord, “Lord, I can’t handle this. Lord, I am in over my head here, and I just don’t understand what I’m going through.” I would suggest: There is never a time when God is shocked by something we tell Him. You know, God has heard it all. In fact, God knows how frustrated we are even before we tell him how frustrated we are. There are times when we just need to dump something on the Lord, and that is exactly what Jeremiah does here.

At the beginning, Jeremiah says that God has deceived him. The word brings across the idea of being enticed, persuaded or seduced. Jeremiah was saying there, “God, you talked me into this! You are the one who convinced me to be a prophet” (paraphrased). And now that he is in the role, he’s almost like an actor who gets sucked into the Hollywood vortex and can only get one kind of role. I think of actors like Christopher Walken. That poor man! He just looks like a bad guy! He just looks evil! In maybe a slightly similar way, once Jeremiah signed up to be a prophet, he became known as the guy who was always preaching doom and gloom. Notice verse 8, ***“For each time I speak, I cry aloud; I proclaim violence and destruction, because for me the word of the Lord has resulted in reproach and derision all day long.”*** Jeremiah is saying, then, “It isn’t my fault: God talked me into it” (paraphrased). Jeremiah was dumping his frustration on the Lord.

Near the end, the prophet seems to wish that he had never been born. We might think: How could a great man of God feel that way? But the issue here is not how Jeremiah felt, the lesson for us is: Jeremiah told God about it. Jeremiah took his feelings and laid it all out there for the Lord to deal with, “Dear Lord God, this is what I am thinking. This is what I am going through.” And that is the lesson for us here: Even when we are frustrated, let’s not turn away from God, but let us turn TO God, and let us tell God about it. Let us (as Jeremiah did) dump it on the Lord.

- III. There is a third and final lesson I'd like for us to consider here, and that is: Even when opposed, even when frustrated, **JEREMIAH KEPT ON PREACHING**. Through it all, Jeremiah kept on doing what he needed to do.

In verse 9, it's almost as if Jeremiah thinks that maybe he has found a solution, "Maybe I can just keep quiet. Maybe I can just forget about being a prophet. Maybe I can just keep my mouth shut for a little bit. If I knock it off for a while, maybe my friends will like me again, maybe I won't get locked up overnight in public anymore. Maybe I need to back off for a while" (paraphrased). The thought crossed his mind, but notice what he says, ***"But if I say, 'I will not remember Him or speak anymore in His name,' then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire shut up in my bones; and I am weary of holding it in, and I cannot endure it."*** We think of what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:16, ***"For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel."*** In other words, Paul, knowing what he knew about God and God's plan, found it impossible not to speak up. Even Paul did not always have immediate positive results, but he kept on preaching and teaching.

Have any of you ever used WD-40? Well, that was kind of random! At this point, you're probably thinking that your preacher has totally lost it. WD-40 is one of the most popular household lubricants. It was developed in 1953 by Norm Larsen in San Diego, California. WD-40 abbreviates the phrase, "Water Displacement, 40<sup>th</sup> Formula." It was originally designed to repel water and prevent corrosion in some of the earliest nuclear missiles. It was designed to displace the standing water that was causing corrosion in the fuel tanks. And as you can tell from the name, Mr. Larsen failed the first 39 times! "Water Displacement, 40<sup>th</sup> Formula." On attempt number forty, Mr. Larsen finally found a formula that worked! The message is: Do not give up – especially when it comes to telling your friends and family about the Lord!

This past Friday night, we attended a wedding in Janesville. This was the daughter of a woman I had baptized back in November 1995. The woman (only about 50 years old) died of cancer while we were at camp last week, and her daughter's wedding was this past Friday. While at the wedding, we talked with one of the godly women from the church in Janesville who was also baptized during the mid-90's, and this woman gave us an update on a young man that we had pretty much given up on. He had left the area, but moved back. This Christian woman is a school crossing guard and ran into this young man in the course of her work, and he is now faithfully attending and learning about God once again. The point is: We might face obstacles and setbacks, but when it comes to teaching God's word, we are not to give up. The word of God is to be like a burning fire shut up in our bones that has no way to go but out – out into the world. Jeremiah, then, in spite of ongoing opposition, poured his heart out to God in prayer, and then kept on preaching and teaching the word of God.

### **Conclusion:**

As we close our thoughts on this passage, I would encourage all of us to renew our commitment to reach out and tell people about the Lord and his church – not just the preacher, but all of us! We have something special here at this congregation, and the people around us need to know about it. Based on talking to many of you and based on my own personal experience, one of the main things holding us back is fear – fear of being rejected, fear of having our friends turn on us – and that fear is something that Jeremiah dealt with nearly 2600 years ago. So, if you are nervous speaking up and telling someone about the Lord, remember Jeremiah. In Chapter 20, Jeremiah was a relatively young man, but as the book progresses, Jeremiah grows older, and the city of Jerusalem is eventually destroyed. Jeremiah is known as the "weeping prophet." In fact, the next book, Lamentations or "Weeping," was also written by Jeremiah. Seeing his nation pay the price for sin was



almost too much to bear, but at least Jeremiah knew that he had done everything in his power to warn about what was going to happen.

Today, we also have a responsibility to teach and to warn. God is looking for people with the courage to stand up and say something, to stand up and explain the plan of salvation. If you are a Christian, you know the plan well enough to explain it to somebody else. We sinned, God sent His Son as a perfect sacrifice, we respond with faithful obedience to God's plan. We admit that Jesus is God's Son, we turn away from sin, and we allow ourselves to be buried in water for the forgiveness of our sins. If you have done this in your own life, then you have a responsibility to tell others.

On the other hand, if you have not yet done this in your own life, and if you know that you have sinned, then you have a responsibility to obey God's plan this morning. Based on God's word, I am telling you that you have to repent and be baptized. If you have any questions, let us know. But if you are ready to obey God right now, let us help. You can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: [fourlakeschurch@gmail.com](mailto:fourlakeschurch@gmail.com)

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One of the kids at church drew this during the lesson and won first place at the county fair!