

A Big Lie

St. Mark Lutheran
Two services

Pastor Ken Welsh
August 28, 2016

Thus says the Lord of hosts: "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord. They say continually to those who despise the word of the Lord, "It shall be well with you", and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, "No disaster shall come upon you."...Behold, the storm of the Lord! Wrath has gone forth, a whirling tempest; it will burst upon the head of the wicked. The anger of the Lord will not turn back until he has executed and accomplished the intents of his heart. In the latter days you will understand it clearly. Jeremiah 23:16-17; 19-20

I am pretty sure most of you have heard the statement, "The pen is mightier than the sword." What does that mean? It means that words can be powerful. It means that using words you can cut a person inside like a knife. Strangely enough, words can not only tear people down, they can build people up. Wise words can prevent tragedies at times. Words can share love and also give comfort to people who are hurting.

What are the most powerful words in the world? It's God's Word. God's Word is all powerful. It is infallible. In our reading today God says his word is like a hammer and like fire! It can tear down and it can rebuild. It consumes and refines. One of the best explanations of the effect of God's word is found in Isaiah 55:11, "...so is my word that goes out from my mouth: it will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

Today, we take a look at God's prophet, Jeremiah. He was called by God at a very difficult time in history to proclaim his word. God knew what was going to happen to the kingdom of Judah, and for that reason God advised Jeremiah not to marry and raise children. He had a call from the Lord to proclaim words that were spoken by God himself and were certain of fulfillment. His ministry started a little over six hundred years before Christ was born, and during it he lashed out at the sins of his countrymen. He criticized them severely for their idolatry, which sometimes even included sacrificing their children to foreign gods. Some of Jeremiah's predictions were fulfilled in the short term and others were fulfilled in the long term. But understand this, Jeremiah loved the people of Judah in spite of their sins. He prayed for them even though God told him not to do so. God was angry with their disobedience.

But along with the sinfulness of God's people, there was another problem. There were others proclaiming that they were prophets from God and telling the people what they wanted to hear. It was all a big lie. They claimed to have had dreams in which they were instructed by the Lord, but their words contradicted what Jeremiah said. God does not contradict himself. But what they said was a lot more popular than the repentance that Jeremiah was calling for. They were false teachers who were passing on their own ideas in the name of God and giving the people of Judah a false sense of security.

There were rumors in Judah that disaster was at hand. People were afraid. But the "experts" denied these reports and rumors. They said there was nothing to worry about and everything was going to be okay. The people could live as they wanted without any fear of consequences. History shows us they were lying. The people of Judah found out too late that what Jeremiah had been saying was the truth.

It is easy for us to look back today and point out the failings of the people of Judah. Their foolishness led to them being overrun by the Babylonians and practically anyone who was worthwhile was carried off into captivity. They should have listened to Jeremiah. But what does this mean to us today?

Winston Churchill, the former Prime Minister of Great Britain, once said this: "Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it." Does this account in Jeremiah have a warning for us today? The hard truth is that it does.

In our society, "sin" is a word that is no longer in fashion, even inside many churches. Many people don't even believe that sin is real. We are drifting further and further away from God's standards of morality. Many of the children of those who consider themselves Christians don't even know what God's standard's are. Their children don't even know the Ten Commandments. Their children don't know the stories in the Bible which teach about the pitfalls and consequences of sin. Many of the children in our society hardly get an hour of Christian instruction in a month, while at the same times statistics show they watch an average of 3-4 hours of television in a day. Which do you think is shaping their concepts of what is right and what is wrong? We need to do better.

The problem is not limited to the children, of course. It really starts with the adults. They are often influenced by what others are saying, especially if it becomes the majority opinion. We can easily give in to false teachers in our world who give all sorts of reasons for not obeying God's laws. They say things like, " You don't really believe the Bible literally, do you?" We can easily condemn those in Judah who sacrificed their children to foreign gods, but what are we saying and doing about our own country which has had over fifty-eight million abortions since the Roe vs. Wade decision in 1973 ? That's well over one million abortions a year. Our sinful flesh looks for all sorts of excuses to do or allow what the Bible clearly calls wrong.

In the midst of false teachings and false teachers, there is one group that must tell the truth. That is the Christian Church. God has given the Church his Word. Jeremiah is no longer around, and God is counting on us. We who believe in Him and follow Him are called to speak his word with faithfulness. We are to oppose those who are speaking a lie. We must call out sin for what it is. We must warn people that disregarding God's Word will likely destroy our society and also destroy people on an individual basis. This will not be popular with many people. We may be the objects of scorn. But we must do that so that people can have the opportunity to turn and repent.

I know many of you are discouraged about what is happening in our society and country these days. Is there any hope for us? There is hope, for even God's wrath has a purpose. Yes, God's Word shows us our sin and it can result in his wrath, however it also does something else. Through God's Word we are offered forgiveness, life, and salvation.

This is possible because God sends his Word made flesh, Jesus. He is the truth. He has taken the wrath of God against sin upon himself on the cross. By Jesus taking our wrath, we are now forgiven.

There may well be people within your circle of friends who have had an abortion. There probably are people among those you know who have made mistakes concerning their sexual behavior. It is likely among your acquaintances that there are those who have been dishonest at times, who have cheated, who have taken advantage of others. The shocking news is God still loves them. You can be angry at someone and still love them. God offers forgiveness and salvation. The gates of heaven are still open. The same Word that condemns them can save them. The same Word that tears down the life we have lived can build it up! God offers us a way out: "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." (Isaiah 1:18) When we are willing to give up the old life of sin, we can receive new life in Christ.

Hearing about our sin and its consequences is never easy, but it is lifesaving. When we turn away from that which is destroying us and into the arms of Jesus. Jesus takes all our sins away and grants us forgiveness. So let us never lose our focus on this. God's main plan and God's main desire are not to condemn us, but to save us through his Son, Jesus Christ. And as a Christian Church, that is the main message we need to proclaim. Amen.