

We all know of someone who has earned the label “lost cause.” We see it whenever someone is stubbornly stuck in their ways, refusing to change, even when they have been shown that what they’re doing is wrong. So, you can understand a little bit of what is going on with Jeremiah.

From a modern perspective, Jeremiah’s prophetic ministry sounds unfulfilling, unattractive, and unsuccessful. He runs into hardcore political opposition, with kings openly threatening his life. Then, there’s religious opposition: other prophets spoke against Jeremiah. They preached peace and prosperity—“Everything is going to be fine”—whereas Jeremiah—preaching the truth—warned of judgment and destruction. And that’s not all. A priest had him beaten and put in stocks; his body clamped in place so he couldn’t move. Another time he would be thrown into a deep hole where he sank down into mud, left for dead.

The thing is, Jeremiah was only doing his job. The Lord had sent him as his messenger of warning to the temple. The message is simple: the people of Judah need to change; to reform their ways and their actions. Obey the Lord. Listen to his commands. Otherwise, God would make the temple like Shiloh (which is to say, destroyed) and this city an object of cursing among all the nations of the earth (Jeremiah 26:6). Return to the Lord because right now you are rocketing toward destruction of your own making. That’s the gist of what Jeremiah was sent to say.

How did that go over? Look at today’s Old Testament lesson. As soon as Jeremiah finished speaking God’s Words, the people crowded around him and grabbed him. They couldn’t believe that Jeremiah would say that such horrible things would happen to this temple, to their city. Utterly offended, they rage at Jeremiah, “You must die!” Kill the Messenger. They refused to listen. They refused to change. They didn’t want to hear that there was any problem with them. What they wanted to hear was that there would be peace and prosperity in the land, that how they were living and acting was just fine. And so, when the officials come to figure out what all the ruckus was about, the priests and the prophets—people who were supposed to be in tune with God’s Word and warnings—insist, “This man should be sentenced to death because he has prophesied against this city!” (v.11).

Now, here’s a question; who do you relate to more in this situation?

It could very well be that you feel connected to Jeremiah. You were concerned for an individual because an addictive behavior was getting out of hand, and you told them. Or, someone was working too much and needed to be spending more time with the family, and so you let them know. You reached out to someone who had stopped coming to church. You spoke up, but they refused to change. They didn’t want to hear it. And there were consequences in that relationship. It feels like ‘kill the messenger.’

And, this is a little harder to take, but it could be that you relate to the people in the crowd too. I’m the one getting upset because of what I’m hearing. I’m quick to insist it’s not that bad. I have it under control. And that can quickly escalate. How dare you tell me that what I’m doing is

wrong. I lash out. I want to ‘kill the messenger.’ Maybe not literally, but at least inflict some pain equal to the level of my embarrassment. Because I’ve been found out.

This really is a terrible problem. In sin, no one wants to be helped, no one wants to “hear it.” It’s not just “they” who are the lost cause. It’s me. What then, is there to do?

At the end of this Scripture passage, Jeremiah says, “¹³ Now therefore mend your ways and your deeds, and obey the voice of the Lord your God, and the Lord will relent of the disaster that he has pronounced against you. ¹⁴ But as for me, behold, I am in your hands. Do with me as seems good and right to you. ¹⁵ Only know for certain that if you put me to death, you will bring innocent blood upon yourselves and upon this city and its inhabitants, for in truth the Lord sent me to you to speak all these words in your ears.”

There’s two things to notice here. Number One: What is there to do? The prophet says, “mend your ways and your deeds and obey the voice of the Lord.” It’s a classic call to repentance, and the call would not be issued if it were not possible. It’s a sincere invitation. Mend your ways and obey the Lord. That the first thing.

The second thing is really remarkable. Jeremiah says to those who want to kill him, “...if you put me to death, you will bring innocent blood upon yourselves...for in truth the Lord sent me to you...” And if you keep reading chapter 26, you soon learn that cooler heads prevailed, and Jeremiah was not put to death that day. However, about six hundred years later, another messenger of God would be surrounded by those who did not want to hear the painful truth. He was violently opposed, falsely accused, and sentenced to death. What was not done to Jeremiah was done to Jesus.

His innocent blood was spilled, but that did not unleash a curse on Jerusalem. Instead, that innocent blood became a lifegiving stream. Jesus’ innocent blood became the currency that paid off our sin debts and purchased us in a great redemptive act. Jesus, the innocent, was sentenced and punished for you and me, the guilty. What was not done to Jeremiah was done to Jesus, and it saved you. It opened the way to God for you. Do you believe this? Is this news of Jesus’ sacrifice in your stead the functional trust of your heart, the one thing you lean on to know you matter? I pray that it is; that you draw your sense of self-worth from the fact that Jesus was willing to switch places with you. I pray you know how deeply you are loved because Jesus was willing to become the lost cause so that you could be found.

Mend your ways and actions. Obey the voice of the Lord your God. Believe the gospel, which says that the disaster of sin’s consequence fell on Jesus, so that it wouldn’t fall on you. And let that give you the tenderness and truthfulness you need to stand for Him.