

The Lord found a pastor in Jeremiah

Jeremiah 23:23-29

²³ Am I a God who is only nearby, declares the LORD, and not a God far away?²⁴ Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the LORD. ²⁵ I have heard what the prophets who prophesy lies in my name have said. They say, "I have had a dream! I have had a dream!" ²⁶ How long will this be in the hearts of these lying prophets? These prophets proclaim the fantasies of their own hearts. ²⁷ They think they can make my people forget my name with the dreams each one tells his neighbor, the way their fathers forgot my name because of Baal. ²⁸ Let the prophet who has a dream tell his dream. But let the one who has my word speak my word faithfully. What has chaff to do with grain? declares the LORD. ²⁹ Is not my word like a fire? declares the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?

An important task is being done at our seminary in Mequon, at our college in New Ulm, in our prep schools in Watertown and in Saginaw, MI. Young men are studying to become pastors. At our seminary future pastors are studying God's word in its original languages. They received training in those languages at our college in New Ulm. Further training has been offered to them at the high school level as well. When their training ends with graduation from the Sem, they'll be well equipped to shepherd God's flock. The Lord shows us what he's looking for in a pastor in this Scripture from Jeremiah 23. He wasn't looking for a man to be popular with people. He wasn't looking for someone who would only tell people what they wanted to hear. Instead, he wants men who will tell people what they need to hear. So our Lord found what he was looking for in the prophet Jeremiah. Unlike many false prophets in his day, Jeremiah did not speak lies. Instead, he used God's Word faithfully. Yes, the Lord found a true pastor in Jeremiah.

To say that Jeremiah was unpopular among his people is an understatement. The reason for his unpopularity was the message God called him to proclaim. Jeremiah had the unpopular task of telling God's people that death and destruction were coming their way. Why? Because they were unfaithful to the Lord. They would not turn from their wicked ways. Do you think Jeremiah enjoyed being a bearer of bad news? He mentions in a previous chapter: "*O Lord, you deceived me and I was deceived; you overpowered me and prevailed. I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me. Whenever I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction. So the word of the Lord has brought me insult and reproach all day long*" (20:7,8).

The reason Jeremiah had such a difficult time telling people what they needed to hear, was because of what many other prophets were telling them. Our Lord says, "*I have heard what the prophets who prophesy lies in my name have said. They say, "I have had a dream! I have had a dream!" How long will this be in the hearts of these lying prophets? These prophets proclaim the fantasies of their own hearts.*" There were men in Jeremiah's time who claimed to have received dreams from God himself. They went around claiming to prophesy in the name of the Lord. But God tells us a few verses before our text: "*I did not send these prophets, yet they have run with their message; I did not speak to them, yet they have prophesied*" (23:21). And what did they tell the people? Lies. All lies. They didn't tell people what they needed to hear. They didn't tell people to admit their sinfulness, repent of their sins and turn

back to God in faith. They claimed to be servants of God, but they only spoke lies. They kept telling people everything was fine between them and their God. They certainly didn't need to listen to Jeremiah. They could just go on living the way they were. They were God's people. Everything would be fine. In an earlier chapter we hear their lies: *"You will not see the sword or suffer famine. Indeed I will give lasting peace in this place"* (14:13).

What a tragedy when people claim to speak for God, but only tell lies. We hear in our text, *"They think they can make my people forget my name with the dreams each one tells his neighbor, the way their fathers forgot my name because of Baal."* What's even more tragic is how the people reacted to false prophets. Instead of listening to the true word of God that Jeremiah proclaimed, they only listened to the lies. Our Lord describes it, *"A horrible and shocking thing has happened in the land: The prophets prophesy lies, the priests rule by their own authority, and my people love it this way"* (5:30,31). But among all those liars, the Lord only found a true pastor in Jeremiah. Jeremiah did not speak lies like others claiming to be prophets. He wasn't concerned about being popular. He was concerned about serving God and speaking the truth, even if it brought him mockery and rejection. The Lord found a pastor in Jeremiah who would not speak lies the way so many others did.

How important is it for a pastor to speak truth, especially when it comes to addressing sin? Ignore sin and see what happens. God wants pastors to serve faithfully. That means pointing out sin. He must warn of the punishment those sins bring. Only then will people appreciate how God found a way to punish sin without punishing them. In surprising grace God sent his Son into our world to please God where we have failed. He came to appease God for our many failures. That meant suffering and dying to pay for all sin. God wants pastors to tell you how God rescued you from sin, by sacrificing his Son in your place. If you're hearing that, then you do have a pastor sent to you by God. And we pray that our Wisconsin Synod keeps training men not to speak lies, but only speak truth and lead each of us to eternal life in Christ.

The Lord certainly found such a pastor in Jeremiah. He didn't speak lies. He didn't care about popularity. He cared about souls. So he used God's Word faithfully.

That's what our Lord wants. Just listen to what he tells us, *"Let the prophet who has a dream tell his dream. But let the one who has my word speak my word faithfully."* That's exactly what Jeremiah did. He used God's word faithfully. When the Lord gave him words to tell the people, he didn't hide anything from them. He spoke God's word clearly and faithfully. Was Jeremiah a failure in his ministry? He didn't really turn many of God's people back to their Lord. Many of them did not repent of their sins and strive to serve their Lord again. Instead, the Lord sent a heathen army to destroy them and carry them off into captivity. Was Jeremiah a failure? By human standards, one might say, "Yes." But in God's eyes, "No!" In God's eyes, Jeremiah was very successful. God found a pastor in Jeremiah. He used God's word faithfully.

How did he faithfully use God's word? He simply proclaimed it and let it do its work. Our text tells us, *"What has chaff to do with grain? declares the LORD. Is not my word like a fire? declares the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?"* Here the Lord uses three pictures to describe the work of God's word—as a hammer, as fire, and as grain. The word of God works as a hammer to crush anything false. It breaks down those who are hardened in sin and smashes sinful pride. The word of God crushes them to see the great need they have

for a Savior. God found a pastor in Jeremiah to use his word as a hammer. And he did so faithfully.

The Lord found a pastor in Jeremiah to use his word like fire. Fire can be destructive. Ask any victim of the fires that raged out west this year. But fire can be a good thing. As days get shorter and temperatures cool down, we appreciate the fire in our furnaces to bring warmth and comfort to our homes. The word of God works like fire. To hardened sinners the word of God does bring destruction. But it also brings warmth and joy to a repentant sinner. The message of Christ crucified blows life-giving embers that warms faith filled hearts on the way to eternal life. Jeremiah brought such warmth to any who would listen in faith: *"The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness"* (23:5,6).

A third way in which God's word works is described in our text as grain. When our Lord asks, "What has chaff to do with grain?" he's comparing the words of men found in the dreams of false prophets to his own word given to Jeremiah. When harvest time came and the wheat was gathered in, the grain had to be separated from the chaff. Only the grain was kept for nourishment. So it was between God's word and man's dreams. Only God's word could provide nourishment for the soul. God found a pastor in Jeremiah to feed souls with good news of a Savior from sin. That gives believers the nourishment they need.

That God's word works as a hammer, as fire, and as grain should bring us comfort. We each share a mission in life. God wants us to tell others the good news about our Savior. God does the difficult work of convincing. He simply wants us to proclaim. It's comforting that God has never given us a quota to fill. He simply wants us to go and tell and share his word faithfully. The results are left to him. To help us carry out our mission he's given us the public ministry. We need men who are trained to use that word faithfully so we can be trained to go out with the gospel. We expect our pastors to feed us God's Word. We've been blessed with a church body that feels our pastors need to work in the original languages of the Bible. When they dig into Scripture daily and then stand in a pulpit or lead a Bible class, we appreciate the time they take studying that Word and bringing to us treasures old and new. You want a pastor to faithfully tell you what God has to say? That is what God wants in a pastor too. It's what he found in Jeremiah.

We all know about the shortage of workers we have who are thoroughly trained to use God's word faithfully. We need young men from every congregation to consider whether they have the gifts to serve the Lord as a pastor. We need parents and grandparents to encourage children for fulltime service in God's kingdom. There is a great need in our world for men like Jeremiah, who use God's word faithfully. Yes the harvest is still plentiful. And the workers are still too few. You know what to do. Ask the Lord of the harvest for more workers. May our Lord continue to find young men that won't speak lies, but will use God's word faithfully. May the Lord find more pastors like Jeremiah among us.