

Jeremiah 26:8-15 ⁸ Now it happened, when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that the LORD had commanded him to speak to all the people, that the priests and the prophets and all the people seized him, saying, "You will surely die!" ⁹ "Why have you prophesied in the name of the LORD, saying, 'This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate, without an inhabitant?'" And all the people were gathered against Jeremiah in the house of the LORD. ¹⁰ When the princes of Judah heard these things, they came up from the king's house to the house of the LORD and sat down in the entry of the New Gate of the LORD's house. ¹¹ And the priests and the prophets spoke to the princes and all the people, saying, "This man deserves to die! For he has prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your ears." ¹² Then Jeremiah spoke to all the princes and all the people, saying: "The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city with all the words that you have heard. ¹³ "Now therefore, amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the LORD your God; then the LORD will relent concerning the doom that He has pronounced against you. ¹⁴ "As for me, here I am, in your hand; do with me as seems good and proper to you. ¹⁵ "But know for certain that if you put me to death, you will surely bring innocent blood on yourselves, on this city, and on its inhabitants; for truly the LORD has sent me to you to speak all these words in your hearing."

Philippians 3:17 - 4:1 ⁷ Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. ¹⁸ For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: ¹⁹ whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame -- who set their mind on earthly things. ²⁰ For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself. ^{4:1} Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved.

Luke 13:31-35 ³¹ On that very day some Pharisees came, saying to Him, "Get out and depart from here, for Herod wants to kill You." ³² And He said to them, "Go, tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected.' ³³ "Nevertheless I must journey today, tomorrow, and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem. ³⁴ " O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing! ³⁵ "See! Your house is left to you desolate; and assuredly, I say to you, you shall not see Me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'" "

Jeremiah spoke the word of God faithfully and it nearly got him killed. Paul spoke the word of God faithfully and it got him whipped many times, and eventually executed. Jesus spoke the word of God faithfully and He ended up being crucified. This is not exactly the type of publicity you would want to have when recruiting faithful speakers of God's word. The message that comes through loud and clear: speaking God's word faithfully could likely end you up dead. Any takers? I hope so.

Today through each of our lessons we are reminded that speaking God's word faithfully might not always be popular, but it always right. Jeremiah had many words of judgment that he had been given to speak over the nation of Judah. He spoke them to the people just as God had revealed them to him. And as soon as he got finished prophesying, the chief priests decided they did not like what they had heard. Jeremiah had spoken words of judgment against them, and for that he should die. Jeremiah faithfully reminded them that what he had said was God's word. If they wanted to kill him, that was up to them. But they should know it would be innocent blood they were spilling.

Paul spoke the word of God wherever he went. And wherever he went he found enemies of the cross ready to harm him for the words he brought to them. In the book of Philippians, he warns his spiritual children

in Philippi that they should expect the same. Despite the warning, his encouragement to them was not to be quiet to save their lives, but rather to stand firm, speak the word of God and wait on Jesus to return to give them their due reward.

And surely no one ever had people after Him for the word of God that He came to speak like Jesus. The Jews could not believe that He called himself the Son of God. The Romans could not believe that He called himself a King. Jesus knew that being faithful had earned many of the prophets death in Jerusalem throughout the ages, and yet in our text for the day He goes to Jerusalem to join their ranks. Yes, remaining faithful for Jesus meant the surrender of His life, and yet He walked steadily toward Jerusalem.

What about us? Do you know anyone who has lost their life for speaking God's word faithfully? I suppose not personally. But if you ever read any publications from the various organizations that watch over Christian persecution, you know that there are still many who do lose their life for speaking God's word faithfully.

But today rather than focusing on what other people across the world are experiencing, we place our focus on us and our faithful speaking. Just fifty years ago or so, you could speak almost any moral biblical teaching without much backlash from society. But that situation has changed. Say that homosexuality is wrong and you will be chastised for not keeping up with the times. Say that there is only one way to heaven and you will be mocked for being intolerant. Say that sex outside of marriage is sin and you will be laughed at as naive. Try to restrict anyone's choices by the word of God and I guarantee that you will not be the most popular person in our world.

But let's bring it even closer to home. Forget about rebuking society as a whole. Just try to speak God word faithfully to those around you. Tell a couple you know that they should not be living as a married couple before they are actually married and see what reaction you get. Tell someone that doesn't come regularly to worship that God us wants us to gather around His word each Sunday and see what they tell you. Tell someone that is full of anger that God requires of us that we be forgiving to all, and wait for the shocked look or loud yell.

The truth still remains; when we share God's confronting word of Law with someone who does not believe in that word, the reaction is usually not pleasant. And while we may not be killed in our country for speaking it, we also will not always be thanked for speaking it either.

But the encouragement that we receive this day from Jeremiah, from Paul, and from Jesus is this: keep speaking that word faithfully, and look to Heaven for approval rather than man.

I doubt any of us like to be shouted at or laughed at when we speak. And for that reason all too often we change the word of God a little to make speaking it a little easier. Or probably more often than changing God's word, we simply don't speak it. We don't want to upset any baskets by speaking the word. But when we do that we are like the prophets who God chastised for speaking peace, peace when there is no peace.

Oh to be sure, we are always called to speak the truth in love as the Scripture directs. We speak even words of judgment because we love the people and want for them what God wants for them, namely for them to come to a knowledge of the truth and be saved. But all too often the phrase speaking the truth in love has been misread to mean beating around the bush while never really saying anything. My friends, that way of doing things is not loving. If we love someone, we bring them to the word of God that they might be corrected by it, and then comforted by it as well. We bring them before the law of God that they might receive the gospel of God, Jesus.

I know I have and reckon that you at times also have softened a word of God in order to not upset someone. And in those times, we both must admit that we have not been as faithful to the word as we should have been. We must admit that at times we are ultra-concerned with the approval of men, and not nearly as concerned with God's approval as we should be. But thankfully today in this season of this Lent we are invited once again to place the sins of our lips before God. And as we repent, God speaks a faithful word to us. He speaks in your ear this morning these words, "You are forgiven for my Son's sake. For every time you failed to speak my word as you should, my Son was crucified. Fear not, you have my approval because when I see you I see my son Jesus' righteousness and not your failures."

Brothers and sisters, I know that being a faithful Pastor for me will mean upsetting some people from time to time. And I know that being a faithful Christian witness wherever God has called you to serve Him will

upset people from time to time as well. But I pray for both of us that our fear of rejection from men will not overcome our desire to speak God's word faithfully. May the Holy Spirit inspire us to speak with great boldness His Holy Word. Amen.