

Dear Disciples of Jesus,

A young man came to church at one of our world mission congregations. He told the pastor that his family had found out that he was going to the Lutheran Church and they had shown their disapproval. He continued to come to hear the word of the Lord, but his home where he lived with his parents was divided. In the Gospel reading Jesus spoke of the fire that he would start. He made it clear it would divide families.

Today in the Old Testament lesson we also learn that the fire of the Gospel will even bring opposition in the church. We hear of false prophets opposing the Lord's spokesman Jeremiah. Yet the fire of the Gospel serves another purpose, it heals and strengthens and so we see Jeremiah courageously standing firm and proclaiming the Lord's word. We may run into trouble as we share our faith, or you may see your pastor taking heat for faithfully proclaiming the Lord's word. However, we are assured in Jeremiah 23 that the Lord helps us as we **Rally Around the Faithful Proclamation of the Word.**

**1. We do this because the word of the Lord reveals the truth. Vs. 23-27**

Can you imagine someone standing up here with me and every few minutes this person takes a turn and contradicts what your pastor has just said. It may not have happened exactly that way to Jeremiah, but the false prophets were quick to contradict what the Lord's prophet was saying. And they did confront him in public. (in chapter 26)

The Lord through Jeremiah was warning the people about their relationship with the Lord God. The false prophets would then go out and give an opposite message. They were succeeding in leading the people away from the Lord. We want to rally around faithful proclamation of the Lord's word, because it tells us about the truth of our relationship with the Lord God.

A. The false prophets would come to the people and say, **"I had a dream. I had a dream."** The people of those ancient times believed that God spoke in dreams or visions and the Scriptures tell us that the Lord God did do this.

1. The truth, however, was that the Lord had not spoken to these false prophets. They were making up their prophecies. Their message was that the Lord God would not punish the people for their sins. They told the people

that Lord didn't care about sins or he couldn't always see or hear what they were doing. He was limited in power. In short they had nothing to worry about. This is what the people wanted to hear.

Things have not changed in our era. Human nature wants a relationship with God, but it wants an easy, comfortable relationship. There is a lot of money to be made by preachers who willing to tell people what they want to hear. One thing people don't want to hear about is punishment for sin and Hell. It is rare today when a Christian preacher is willing to talk about Heaven and Hell in honest terms.

So the false prophets of Jeremiah's day opposed him and caused trouble because they wanted the attention of the people and they wanted to profit and gain a reward from their position.

B. Jeremiah on the other hand spoke the truth even though it cost him.

1. In chapter 19, verse 3-5 the Lord gave Jeremiah this message to proclaim, **“Hear the word of the Lord, you kings of Judah and people of Jerusalem. This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Listen! I am going to bring a disaster on this place that will make the ears of everyone who hears of it tingle. 4 For they have forsaken me and made this a place of foreign gods; they have burned incense in it to gods that neither they nor their ancestors nor the kings of Judah ever knew, and they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent. 5 They have built the high places of Baal to burn their children in the fire as offerings to Baal—something I did not command or mention, nor did it enter my mind.”** It was a hard message, but Jeremiah proclaimed it.

The average American may not want to hear it, but faithful proclaimers are going to point out the sinfulness in our lives. Because the Lord has commanded it. They will also point out that God is not limited. He is a God nearby and far away. No one can escape God's justice.

2. One of the accusations that non-Christians make is that people like Jeremiah are just trying to scare simple minded people into submission to the church. The Lord states his own purpose. To this same generation in the book of the Ezekiel the Lord says, **“Say to them, ‘As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, people of Israel?’”** (33:11) He wanted them to repent and live in the forgiveness of sins that he had promised in the coming Savior.

At the beginning of Jeremiah 23 the Lord promises, **“The days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will raise up for 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 Righteous Savior.”** (5-6) The righteous King is Jesus. Through his righteous life and his righteous death at the cross, Jesus won justice. He took the punishment for sin. All who believe in him have forgiveness and righteousness with God. The Lord sent Jeremiah not to hurt the people, but to help save them through the proclamation of the Gospel. As we rally around the faithful proclamation today this is what we want. We want sinners to be saved in Jesus.

## **2. We do this because the word of the Lord is effective. Vs. 25-29**

Years ago I returned to my former congregation for a special event. While I was there a young lady came up to me and said, “Hi!” We talked a little about the career path she had chosen. She said, “I want to thank you for all the things we did in teen ministry. She was grateful for teen Bible classes, group sessions and the activities that had taken place. She reminded me that the word of the Lord is effective. We hear this also in Jeremiah 23.

A. The Lord says in verse 29, **“Is not my word like fire,” declares the Lord, “and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?”**

1. The word of the Lord is effective like a hammer. The word “hammer” in Hebrew describes a sledge hammer. It is a big hammer used to pound circus sized tent pegs and it can be used to break rock. Without modern machinery in the old days, if you wanted to build on rock you had to use such a hammer to prepare the sight for building a home.

The Law of God is a hammer that shows our sins and crushes any thoughts that we are holy in his sight and good enough to earn heaven. God’s law shows our guilt and that we deserve eternal condemnation. When the Law works, we know we are in trouble.

2. The word of the Lord is also a fire. Fire consumes, but it also purifies. As we hear of the Son of God’s sacrifice for us, it sets our hearts on fire with faith. As we hear of his continuing love for us, the fire grows. Through continued exposure to the Gospel that fire never goes out.

B. We have two examples of how effective the word was in Jeremiah’s day.

1. Jeremiah, despite being threatened and finally imprisoned, despite things getting worse, persevered in his ministry.

2. It was worth it, because a small group of believers persevered in their faith and passed it down to their children. They returned from the Babylonian Captivity and waited for the birth of the Savior.

There are ministries and mission fields today, where you don't see a lot of outward success, but the Word of the Lord is still effective and accomplishes what he desires.

C. So the Lord would say to us what he said in Jeremiah's day, **“Let him who has my word proclaim it faithfully.”**

1. An argument can be made that we have been given the Word, because we have churches and preachers who proclaim it truthfully. But is that word in our possession if we don't know what it says? We aren't going to remember everything or understand all of the Bible, but every Christian should have good basic understanding of God's Law and Gospel. We have magazines, booklets and all kinds of Bible helps to aid us in learning. We need to ask the Lord to forgive us our disinterest and laziness and ask his help in building on what we already know.

2. When we gather to worship and study the Lord's word we are rallying around the Gospel. Rallying also means praying for and supporting pastor and congregation when they are standing against false teachers. A pastor must warn his congregation of false teachers who are leading people away from the saving Gospel. However the pastor must also lead them to Jesus who is our righteousness and salvation. Pray as well for the District Presidents and Circuit Pastors of the WELS who have to help our pastors who get stuck in a false teaching, by showing them what the Bible says. The Lord will bless our standing together and the support we give.

Conclusion: When I think of Jeremiah standing firm, I also think of Martin Luther at the Diet in the City of Worms. When pressed to give up the teachings of the Bible he said, *“Here, I stand. I cannot do otherwise. So help me God.”* Before Luther was Jeremiah. We see how both men had strength and stood their ground. It was the Word, specifically the Gospel Fire. It helped. The “Hammer” of the law was also there to help them speak the truth to the unrepentant. Some believed and were saved. Likewise we rally around the faithful proclamation of the Word of the Lord. Amen.