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SERMON TITLE: Revived and Reforming
The Life & Times of Jeremiah
SCRIPTURE: Jeremiah 20:1-13
DATE: November 3, 2019
Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

Read also Colossians 3:1-10

We are familiar with Jeremiah's strong message. We are familiar with his messages of revival. He began prophesying during the reign of Josiah, king of Judah in 627 B.C. Josiah was king when the priest Hilkiah discovered the Scripture in the temple. Because he was so moved by the Scriptures, Josiah began a revival of faith.

Later, however, Jeremiah wrote his messages down on a scroll and Baruch his scribe read it to the next king, Jehoiakim, and he cut it up and threw it in the fire. He did not respond to the call for revival. Neither did the kings who followed him: Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, or Zedekiah.

Revival does not always lead to reform. Those kings preferred to be a government of status quo; *everything was going to be alright*. In the meantime, the other great influencer in society was the religious community. How would church leaders respond to Jeremiah's message? Let's hear it. READ Jeremiah 20:1-13

Pashur led a megachurch (Temple) and yet he resisted the leading prophet of the land. One leader ignores the problems and sees a happy future. The other sees doom and trouble ahead if the people do not reform their religious apathy. Should we believe that strength comes from the "everything's alright" message? Or from a message of "we need to turn to the Lord now?" It is a question the church needs to ponder.

First you have the governmental leader who was so upset about Jeremiah's call for revival that he arrested, beat, and put Jeremiah in stocks to stop him from talking. Why the resistance, especially from the church?

According to Eugene Peterson, Pashur was a pastor who wanted to make people feel good about themselves; to see life in a better light. He saw religion as a way to successful, happy living. Peterson calls it "massaging the national psyche." The church leaders did not want to confront the problems—the injustice, the crime, the pagan fertility rites and hidden sex shrines, or the wide gap between rich and poor.¹

But the other way, Jeremiah's way, Peterson says, sees religion as a way in which "hurt, flawed, and damaged persons

become whole in relation to God." The idea is that when we are confronted with our disobedience, it gives us a chance to change. It is in understanding your problems that you can then correct them. So, Jeremiah will accept "mockery, pain, renunciation, and self-denial" to help people understand their personal reality so they can change it.

One approach—which Pashur was doing—"is the way of enhancing what I want." The other way—of reforming my ways—"is a commitment of myself to become what God wants." (p. 83-84)

So what should the purpose of the church be? Should it be to make you feel good and be satisfied with your life as it is? Or should it be concerned with not only your own spiritual growth but also the spiritual health of the community around you?

Listen to Eugene Peterson's definition of a strong church with a good pastor. The pastor is "to proclaim and interpret Scripture, to guide people into a life of prayer, to encourage faith, to represent the mercy and forgiveness of Christ at special times of need, to train people to live as disciples in their families, in their communities and in their work." (82-83)

Jeremiah challenged Pashur because he wanted people to hear the truth. Malcolm Muggeridge said, "Every happening, great and small, is a parable whereby God speaks to us, and the art of life is to get the message." Jeremiah wanted people to get the message so that they could be spiritually reformed.

It's like going to a doctor who says you are in outstanding physical shape for your age. But then you have a TIA² and you find out your blood pressure is so high and cholesterol so out of control you are a stroke waiting to happen. You confront the doctor. He says, 'I didn't want to make you feel bad. Besides, it's bad for business!'

Pashur did not want prophecies which required reforming. It was bad for business. So he squelched the message. Do you find yourself hypersensitive to warnings and judgment? Perhaps we all are. Then again, maybe those messages, should we listen to them, can serve to help us.

Once, my son bought a used car for a great price. It appeared to be in mint condition. But one day it rained, and it

¹Eugene Peterson, *Run with the Horses*, Chapter 7, p. 85.

² Transient Ischemic Attack – a mini stroke where a blood clot gets lodged in an artery, restricting blood flow to the brain

actually rained in the car. The front floorboard filled up with water. He couldn't tell where the water came from. The next time it rained he knew the answer because water literally poured in from up under the dash. It seemed the car had been salvaged from the Katrina floods. It had been totaled out but the title did not say "salvage." The used car dealer did not tell the truth. That car was unfixable.

Jeremiah didn't want lies. He wanted true reform. Times were difficult for his nation. Three world powers were struggling for world dominance and not one of those nations was driven by God. Israel was positioned in the middle between Assyria, Babylon, and Egypt. They succumbed to the pagan practices of those three nations, rather than staying true to God. They were unable to resist those nations which were bearing down on them. God's people were spiritually weak and rendered faith in God as powerless. Pashur's lack of spiritual leadership had hurt them. When troubles came, they fell to worthless idols.

So how does reform happen? Especially, how does reform happen when pressure is all around you, like it was on Israel—the nations were encroaching on them; the economy was shaky; people had fallen away from worship; the king and the pastor were resistant to Jeremiah's efforts at revival.

Would you have wanted to quit? Who cares? I've tried and it's hopeless!

What are you trying to do in your personal life that you put your heart and soul into and it just does not seem to be working out? Are you ready to throw up your hands? Do you want to walk away? Is it setback after setback?

A Puritan by the name of William Gurnall said, "Don't give up!" He said "Satan aims to make a breach between God and you. Because Satan hates you and God, he wants you to doubt God's love and attention. He wants you to "cool in your devotion to God." But God wants to use the trouble to deepen you spiritually.³

Don't give up! God is still in control. If something is going wrong in your world, God is not unaware of your problems nor has God abandoned you, just like God did not abandon Jeremiah. God constantly offers guidance, and God will not let Satan trample you. God cares.

In 1857 a crisis arose in New York City. The police were corrupt. Crime was out of control. A new mayor came into power and tried to reform the police department by establishing another police force. The two police departments feuded. When one police department would make an arrest, the other would let the criminals go. Crime became even worse and the feud heightened. It led to a riot.

Times were turbulent due to economic collapse and sharp political division. People dropped out of church and many moved from the area. Churches began closing. Except one church did not give up.

The North Dutch Reformed Church chose a different path. They decided to stay and reach out to all the now unchurched people. Jeremiah Lauphler, a local businessman with lots of faith and energy led the effort.

Jeremiah tried a million ideas to revive the church, but it was prayer that worked. He started a Wednesday prayer meeting for local businessmen—"12:00-1:00; Five, ten minutes, or the whole time, as your time admits."

The first day, September 23, 1857, Jeremiah was the only one. After 45 minutes, someone showed up; then another, until five joined him. The next week, the six became twenty, and the next, forty. Soon the meetings were changed to daily.

All denominations came together to follow a simple agenda: pray for one another's needs and pray for the lost. Not long afterward, the meetings moved to a larger room. In a matter of weeks, thousands were gathering to pray in New York and as many as 10,000 people were professing Christ.

From there, prayer meetings spread across the United States. Even Presbyterians from Ireland sent delegates to the New York prayer meeting, returned home, started their own, and later reported that 100,000 came to Christ through them.

The North Church had a plan for the neighborhood; the Lord had a plan for the nation, which even spread to the world.

Let's think of our own lives. Shall we not seek only a successful life where everything is always okay, but rather *seek to become what God wants us to be*—and spread that message to our community during these hard times? Because isn't it in the hard times that people are most responsive to Christ?

William Gurnall said, "Do not be too quick to bury the church before she is dead. . . . By your prayers, bring Christ to its grave to speak a resurrection word." Perhaps we will see revival.

AMEN

³ William Gurnall, abridged by Ruthanne Garlock, Kay King, Karen Sloan, and Candy Coan, *The Christian in Complete Armour*, Vol. I (Lindale, TX, World Challenge, Inc., 1988), p. 119-122.