



Jeremiah 20:7-13 - ⁷ O LORD, you deceived me, and I was deceived; you overpowered me and prevailed. I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me. ⁸ 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. ⁹ But if I say, "I will not mention his name or speak any more in his name," his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot. ¹⁰ I hear many whispering, "Terror on every side! Report him! Let's report him!" All my friends are waiting for me to slip, saying, "Perhaps he will be deceived; then we will prevail over him and take our revenge on him." ¹¹ But the LORD is with me like a mighty warrior; so my persecutors will stumble and not prevail. They will fail and be thoroughly disgraced; their dishonor will never be forgotten. ¹² O LORD Almighty, you who examine the righteous and probe the heart and mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you I have committed my cause. ¹³ Sing to the LORD! Give praise to the LORD! He rescues the life of the needy from the hands of the wicked.

The Word of God Causes Fire



To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father – to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen. (Revelation 1:5b-6)

You finally get your chance. There you are, standing in front of a sports arena filled with people who are gathered to hear what you have to say. The celebrity pastor of this mega church has given up his pulpit so you can share a message. These people are accustomed to hearing their celebrity pastor preach to them about how God wants them all to be successful and wealthy, to get promotions at work, and to enjoy a carefree existence in the world. These people are accustomed to hearing their celebrity pastor never really take a hard line on topics the Bible speaks a great deal about: purity of teaching, the damning result of sin, or so-called “alternate lifestyles.” Instead, with a great deal of flashy oration he never really has to address these controversial topics and thus never really has to offend anyone with God’s law. His people love him for it. But now it’s your turn. What are you going to say? Will you tell itching ears what they want to hear and so gain their love, favor, and adulation? Or will you proclaim to sinful people what they need to hear? Please don’t misunderstand me. I’m not saying that mega churches are devoid of true Christians – far from it. What I am wondering is if we were presented with the opportunity to share God’s truth with a potentially hostile audience, would we share God’s truth or cave to tell people what they want to hear? Would we readily and confidently face down the fire of opposition that God’s Word causes, or will we try to skate by cool and clean on the other side? God’s prophet Jeremiah was faced with that dilemma.

When Jeremiah was called by God to be a prophet, it was a mountain top experience. As is often the case when God calls prophets to service, Jeremiah tried to excuse himself from duty (does that ever strike you that people try to bargain with God himself as he speaks to them?). What were his objections? **I am only a child.** Don’t say you’re only a child...you’re my child. **I don’t know how to speak.** Words? I’ve got all you need, Jeremiah. **I have put my words in your mouth.** It’s a scary task to speak God’s truth to people who might not want to hear it, what about all those people? **Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you, and will rescue you.** I don’t know if this is for me, Lord. Jeremiah, **Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.** Hard to argue with God as he perfectly and profoundly knocks down every single one of your objections and replaces them with beautiful promises. So Jeremiah went to work with God’s presence by his side, God’s words in his mouth, God’s purpose coursing through his veins, and God’s loving protection surrounding him. We might say Jeremiah was loaded for bear – ready to face down the fire of opposition that his message might well cause.

Jeremiah’s call to ministry was a dramatic and inspiring event. Jeremiah’s specific task of ministry was not an entirely pleasant one. His message would be anything but popular. *Hey Israel, you know those idols you’re clinging to? Well those are just lifeless stone and wood. The true God of heaven and earth isn’t happy with you – in fact, punishment is coming for your wickedness.* Within a matter of years, Babylon would be on their doorstep to rip God’s people away from the Promised Land, ransack the city, and destroy the temple. And Jeremiah got to share all of that with the people. How did the people of God react to such jarring and jaw dropping news? Mostly, they ignored Jeremiah. In fact, they did more than just ignore him. They hurt him. They treated him like the playground tattletale or the conscientious schoolmate who reminds the teacher that she forgot to assign homework – they rejected Jeremiah’s message and they ostracized him. Time and again, Jeremiah’s faithful proclamation of God’s word earned him only threats of physical violence, threats of legal ramifications, and eventually the people would get so fed up with him, they’d throw him in a pit. In fact, in the verses just before our text for today, we hear that Jeremiah was thrown into the stocks by an officer in the temple of God, for goodness’ sake!



With his neck and wrists still rubbed raw from spending a night in the stocks, Jeremiah unleashed an almost unthinkable accusation against the God who called him to preach. *You lied to me, God!* Jeremiah said, **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.** You can hear the hurt in his voice, can't you? *Lord, you sold me a bill of goods! Talk about a 'bait and switch.'* *I thought you were going to be with me. I thought your words were powerful. What was all that talk about this being my gig even before I was formed in the womb?!* Jeremiah the prophet was facing down the fire caused by God's word and he wasn't enjoying it. In fact, he teeters so closely to the brink of despair that he accuses God of deceiving him; of being the cause of all his problems and hardships.

Have you ever been there? Outside of a grade school field trip to an Old World Wisconsin village, I've never felt the stocks slapped on me – and I'm guessing you haven't either. But what about the other part – blaming God – have you ever been there? God may not have called you to be a prophet to the nations from before your birth into this world, but he's made some equally astounding promises to you. He promises that he's chosen you to be his child from before the creation of the world. He promises that he's with you always in every circumstance. He promises that even now, he rules over all things for one purpose – your eternal good. Just like Jeremiah, you're loaded to the gills with unfathomable promises from the Almighty God. But what happens when you face the fire caused by the word of God? Where does your focus turn? Back to the rock solid promises God has made to you in your Baptism, or like Jeremiah, do you start to see your Christian life as an unbearable burden? *Lord, there's so much that I don't have! There are so many people in my work, even in my family, who don't support me or even agree with me. This whole Christianity thing is just a wet blanket draped over the fun I could be having with my friends – or the professional success I'd be enjoying if this pesky morality would quit getting in the way.* Is it worth it to live as a Christian and share God's truth no matter what the cost? Or is the fire of opposition in my face too bright and hot? There's the world's opposition – like a fire in my face preventing me from achieving my goals, keeping me from enjoying my life...so what's the use?

Jeremiah was tempted to think that way. His mind was going down a dangerous road. **But if I say, "I will not mention him or speak any more in his name, his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot."** Even though the Word of God caused a fire of opposition in Jeremiah's life, it caused an even brighter, hotter, stronger blaze in Jeremiah's heart – the fire of God's love for him in the Savior revealed in the gospel he was called to share. Jeremiah wasn't *excluded* from the good news he was called to proclaim...and neither are you. Sometimes the Word of God and our lives as Christians will raise up a scorcher of a fire of opposition, never forget God's love for you in Christ burns white hot. Listen to how Jeremiah said it, **But the LORD is with me like a mighty warrior; so my persecutors will stumble and not prevail.** You have a Savior God who fights for his people...and ALWAYS wins.

So when you face opposition because of your Christian faith; when you're referred to as hateful, small-minded bigots because you stand on the rock-solid truth of God's Word in a world gone wrong; when you stare down the utter rejection Jeremiah faced, remember who's in your corner: someone who is remarkably familiar with rejection: Jesus. The God who resolves to fight for his people sent his ultimate mighty warrior into a world that would reject him, harass him, and kill him. In what looked like a blowout loss, God won the most unbelievable victory in history. God took my every sin and yours – every time I shy away from the truth of God's Word, every time I forget the God who's in my corner, every time I focus on what I don't have or what I'll never get in this life – God took all of those sins and placed them on Jesus. In Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, he paid for every sin and saved you and me from the eternal fires of hell.



So what now? Face down the fire caused by God's Word. Don't fear; give thanks! If you face opposition from the sinful world, it shouldn't be surprising. Jesus himself told us, **No servant is greater than his master...If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.** In calling us to trust him, Jesus gives us no rose-colored glasses about what the Christian experience will be like in an un-Christian world. There's talk of self-denial, crosses, and rejection – all because of him. He pulls no punches, **"In this world you will have trouble."** There's no getting around it. **"But take heart! I have overcome the world."** Rather than let us sit at our pity-party of one, your God calls on you to look past the trouble of this life that can be, at worst, light and momentary when compared to the ultimate victory he gives you in Christ. When you face the fire caused by God's Word, do what Jeremiah ended up doing, **Sing to the LORD! Give praise to the LORD! He rescues the life of the needy from the hands of the wicked.** Whenever you face the fire of opposition, praise God. Proclaim his truth in the face of that fire. Trust in his promise to be with you at all times and in all places. You have a God who fights for you and always wins.

Amen

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power, and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen. (Jude 24-25)