July 17, 2011, Sermon: Jeremiah 20:7-13

“A True Prophet Must Speak”
I. Jeremiah – his story
II. Jeremiah – his complaint.
   III. Jeremiah – his fire.
   IV. Jeremiah – his example.

(I. Jeremiah – his story)

A. Jeremiah was a young man when God called him into the ministry.
   1. From the moment of his call to the end of his life, he was faithful in his
      work. But his ministry was not a happy one. He was called to preach
      in an age when people would not listen. Jeremiah was a very sensitive
      man. We might say he had a rather thin skin. He loved people and
      would agonize over their hard hearts. He did not take criticism well.
      He would frequently express how his heart was torn because those he
      loved most, turned against him – even laughing at him. When love is
      great, often grief is also great. Sometimes he is known as the weeping
      prophet.
   2. Because of his great emotion, Jeremiah had very interesting sermons.
      In his preaching Jeremiah soared, for the Lord had given him a poet’s
      eye and ear. He used that gift to the fullest. Simple truths became
      powerful proclamations. Even so, his preaching brought few to
      repentance, but he was true to the call God had given him. And God
      asks no more.
   3. One reason for the deaf ears was the location of his ministry. He was
      a preacher in the Middle East. Just as it is today, the political situation
      was tense. The Arab nations were in conflict with each other, but
      Israel always seemed to be the common target. Egypt wanted to
      control Israel and Syria. Jeremiah began his ministry in 627 B.C. A
      year later the Iraqis (then known as the Babylonians) rebelled and
      gained independence from the Assyrians. “Live and let live” was not
      part of the picture. They wanted to conquer other nations, and they
      did. Nation after nation came under their control. They defeated
      Egypt in the famous battle of Carchemish and so they were in control
      of the entire Middle East, including Israel and Syria. As usual, Israel
      was caught in the squeeze play between Egypt to the southwest and
      the Babylonian (Iraqi) Empire to the northeast. As it is today, they
      were the land bridge between great Arab nations.

B. Israel’s reaction to this was disappointing.
   1. You would think with all the political turmoil that Israel would raise
      their hands in prayer and their eyes to the heavens to beg God for
      help. But the population would rather wallow in its misery rather than
listen to the preacher Jeremiah. That’s what was frustrating about the ministry. Jeremiah knew the answer to their problems and he would tell them what would work. But the people were too proud to listen. They thought of all the secular solutions, but they simply were not that interested in Jeremiah’s style of religion.

2. Jeremiah directed his speeches more toward Jerusalem, the capitol city (Jeremiah 7-10). He denounced the social sins and the false worship. The people looked at the mighty nations around them and thought that it must be popular to worship the way they do. They even sacrifice their children in the fire (Jeremiah 7:31). Jeremiah could not keep silent. He pointed to the places of their false worship and called it the Valley of Slaughter. Then God told Jeremiah to speak this prophecy about what would happen there: “Then the carcasses of this people will become food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and there will be no one to frighten them away. I will bring an end to the sounds of joy and gladness and to the voices of bride and bridegroom in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem, for the land will become desolate” (Jeremiah 7:33,34).

Transition: Jeremiah 20 is a low time in his ministry. He is despondent, to the edge of despair. He seems to doubt his worth as a preacher to God’s people. With all the messages of encouragement and preaching and teaching and pleading, there were no results.

(II. Jeremiah – his complaint)

A. We sense some doubt that God's Word is true.
   1. Way back when he was first called to be a prophet, almost the first words God spoke to him in his youth were these: “Do not be afraid of them, for I will be with you and rescue you” (Jeremiah 1:8). Then he said it again: “They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the LORD (1:19). Did God lie to him? Where was the rescue?
   2. God had told him that it was going to be a difficult service. But now there was real pain. Had God lied to him? “Deceive me and I am deceived; you overpowered me and prevailed” (Jeremiah 20:7). Jeremiah didn’t know it would be this bad.

B. So Jeremiah vents. His emotions erupted as a volcano.
   1. 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. (20:7b,8). Everyone likes to be liked. No one likes to be despised. Jeremiah was no exception. The people on the street laughed at him and made fun of him.
2. Behind his back is often worse. Then he had no way to defend himself. “I hear many whispering, ‘Terror on every side! Report him! Let’s report him!’” (20:10a). There was a conspiracy against him. The enemies wanted to take it to the next level. They wanted to submit a formal complaint against him. Jeremiah was prophesying only what God said – that there would be destruction coming because of their disobedience.

3. What really hurt was that even those closest to him turned against 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’” (20:10b).

Transition: He was ready to give up. He didn’t want to be a prophet anymore. He was sick and tired of the persecution and the pain. He was done with it. But then a spark ignited in him.

(III. Jeremiah – his fire)

A. He could do nothing else but preach God’s Word.
1. “But if I say, ‘I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,’ his word is in my heart like a burning fire, shut up in my bones. I am weary of hold it in; indeed, I cannot’” (20:9). When he would try to refrain from speaking God’s Word, there was something inside that had to get out. He had to preach. He could not restrain himself. It would bobble out. He was filled with the Word. It was who he is. The Word was so a part of his life that if he did not speak the Word, there was really nothing else to talk about.

2. And this is what came out of his mouth: “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” (20:11). God would not go back on his promises. The LORD God Almighty was going into battle for him. He preached God’s destruction to the people. Yes indeed, there still would be a few who would listen and repent. That’s because God’s Word is a powerful force in the hearts of people. Jeremiah was convinced of that. God told him, “Is not my word like a fire,” declares the LORD, “and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?” (23:29).

Transition: Being burned and hammered by the Word is a preparation for the comfort of the Gospel.

B. Jeremiah could not help but speak of the warmth of the good news.
1. He speaks of a great deliverance. “He rescues the life of the needy from the hands of the wicked” (20:13b). He applied this to himself. Even through his tears and the terrors of his heart, deep down he
knew God would not forsake him. God would keep his promises. That is a part of who God is. He is faithful in every way.

2. But he also applied this guarantee to people in general. As a prophet, God gave Jeremiah insight into a mystery. There would be a great Rescuer who would ultimately free all God’s people from their spiritual enemies. “The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and establish justice and righteousness 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). Through the Savior to come, the warmth of God’s fire would burn in the hearts of God’s people. He himself would clothe them in righteousness as a Bride in a pure white wedding gown.

3. Like Jeremiah we cannot keep silent. We have this in us. It is who we are. We want to worship. “Sing to the LORD! Give praise to the LORD!” (20:13a).

Transition: When you come here to worship, part of that is not only what you sing to God, but what I say to you in this sermon. So you see, Jeremiah needs to be an example to me as your pastor.

(IV. Jeremiah – the example)

A. We too give some unpopular messages.
1. When we preach and teach, I hope you know that we must speak these things. Many truths of the Bible are not popular beliefs. When the Bible establishes the roles of men and women in the church, we too must establish it. The Bible is clear in many places that we must maintain fellowship principles which includes close Communion. Sometimes as a church it is necessary that we carry out discipline cases when there is open sin.

2. People of the world reject us and even laugh at us because we stand for Bible truths. Yet we must speak. We cannot remain silent.

B. At the center of our teachings, we also maintain that same two basic truths.
1. There is the law principle that no one likes to hear. It degrades us. When I was a boy and we had a young puppy and the puppy would make a mess on our carpet, my mother would hold the dogs nose in the mess while smacking it with a newspaper. That’s what the law does to us. It holds our noses into the mess of our sins, to make us aware of the stench. You don’t like it; neither do it. But it is a necessary message to empty us of pride and prepare our hearts for the Rescuer. No one can understand Jesus until they understand the stink of their sin.
2. Then the good news of Jesus comes to our relief. We don’t have to live eternity in hell. Jesus had open the kingdom of heaven to all who place their trust in him. He has freed us from the curse of the law, by becoming a curse for us on the cross (Galatians 3:13).

3. That gives us every reason to Sing to the LORD! Give praise to the LORD! Why? Because he rescues the life of the needy from the hands of the wicked (20:13).

Conclusion:
Jeremiah is a prophet we can relate to. He was an emotional human mouthpiece for God. We thank God for his words.

Next week we will continue to learn more about what kind of God we have through the prophet. Next week this dear passionate prophet instructs us on how we can tell the difference between a true prophet and a false prophet, between a true church and a false church. Again it’s something we need to sort through in a religiously diverse society. And again we will see that a true prophet must speak. Amen.