

Jeremiah 26:8-9,11-15 (v. 12-13) - **“Then Jeremiah said, ‘The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the things you have heard. Now reform your ways and your actions and obey the Lord your God.’”**

Dear People of God Longing to Live for Jesus:

If your parents corrected or scolded you as you were growing up, was your first thought to find a way to put them to death? Sounds ridiculous, although some children grow up never having to live within limits, and so when they go off to school or work and someone tells them “no” or corrects them, they don’t have any clue how to react -- except to get angry and lash out. Some call it going ballistic.

The people of Israel in Jeremiah’s day went ballistic when he spoke God’s Word to them. They needed correcting and they sure didn’t like it. We are reminded today, however, that ***God’s People Need to Hear the Truth*** (1) *Israel needed to hear it an reform their ways*. And we need to ask this question: (2) ***Does the Church today need one too?***

### 1

As you know, our teachers have been receiving a lot of divine calls recently. Just imagine if, when they got the call, the calling body said, *“We want you to come and teach here, but we aren’t going to listen to you.”* That would be difficult! That’s much like what Jeremiah was facing with the Israelites. God sent Jeremiah to speak his message to them, but they didn’t listen. In fact, they became irate! In chapter 6 God writes, ***“I appointed watchmen over you and said, ‘Listen to the sound of the trumpet!’ But you said, ‘We will not listen!’”*** They were just plain stubborn; stiff-necked, as God calls it.

To be sure, Jeremiah’s message was not pleasant. But that wasn’t Jeremiah’s fault. The people had quit listening to God long ago. Their faith was a sham. They were greedy, immoral, and unjust. Jeremiah’s hearers were impenitent from prophet to priest to people. Jeremiah warned them: ***“This place will be like Shiloh.”*** Shiloh was the worship center in the northern kingdom that was destroyed when the Assyrian’s attacked. In other words, Jerusalem was next. Because of their sin and arrogance, Jerusalem was going to be destroyed!

Remember Jonah, the reluctant prophet? When the *Gentiles* in Nineveh heard a similar message from Jonah, they put on ***“sack cloth and ashes”*** and repented of their evil. Jonah’s message shook them to the core! But when these Israelites, chosen people of God, heard Jeremiah’s message, they went into a rage! ***“You must die! This man must be sentenced to death because he has prophesied against this city!”***

The truth hurts. People get defensive. The same thing happened when priest Martin Luther tried to wake up the Roman Catholic Church in the early 1500s. For teaching that people are saved by God’s grace through faith in Christ alone rather than by our own works or by the sale of indulgences, burning of candles, or conducting of masses, Luther, too, was sentenced to death. Yes, the truth hurts when it hits home.

The truth that hurts, of course, is the Law of God. One of the main purposes of the Law is to act as a mirror. Confirmation students know that’s the “SOS”: Shows our Sins. We can’t deny the honesty of the mirror as it reveals our blemishes.

Someone once likened the Law to a dentist’s mirror. With that little mirror the dentist can detect cavities or other problems. However, he can’t drill with it or use it to pull teeth. It shows issues, but it can’t fix them.

So the Law shows our spiritual problems, but it can’t fix them! The Law shows how much we need someone to fix our terrible problem that separates us from God. That someone is Jesus Christ. Jesus, the promised Savior, is the sin-fixer, sin-destroyer! He could do that because he alone could fol-

low God's law perfectly and give you credit for it. He alone could be the sacrifice that satisfied God's anger for all of our selfish sins.

Jeremiah hoped the Israelites would see their sin so they could appreciate God's grace. ***"The LORD (the God of free and faithful grace) sent me to prophesy...all the things you have heard. Now reform your ways and your actions and obey the Lord your God."***

God's people needed a reformation. Jeremiah was there to speak the Word in hopes that it would happen.

## 2

Does God's Church today need a reformation too? Recently I spoke about a decline in membership in the Christian church and, where membership has remained stable, there is still a decline in worship attendance. Our priorities are obviously changing. We have also seen and read about horrible abuses taking place in Christian church bodies -- abuses against children and others. This has taken a terrible toll on people's faith.

What is more, many churches today are no longer speaking out in truth about the moral issues God addresses in the Bible. In fact, when theologically conservative churches speak about the sins of abortion, God's plan for marriage, and others -- we are ridiculed and even shamed. How dare we! No, how dare God?! Their issue is not with the messenger -- like Jeremiah. Their issue is with God himself. It's his message.

When it comes to ***"reforming our ways and actions"*** as Jeremiah said, we need to do some honest evaluations. Am I becoming more and more just like the world and society I live in, or more like my brother Jesus (who was not at all like the sinful world)? Am I becoming complacent in my faith, or is it growing and stretching?

Author **Ronald Meredith** wrote about an evening when some wild geese flew near his house. He watched as some tame geese in his pond heard the wild geese overhead. They started to stir as they heard the honking above them. The tame geese began to flap their wings, but it was feeble. The urge to fly was in them, but it soon left them. He says, ***"The matter had been settled long ago. The corn in the barnyard was too tempting. Now their desire to fly only made them uncomfortable. Temptation is always enjoyed at the price of losing the capacity for flight."***

How about us? Are we so rooted in the world that we can no longer fly above it? Someone said, ***"Complacency makes people fear the unknown, mistrust the untried, and abhor the new. Like water, complacent folks follow the easiest course -- downhill. They draw strength from looking back."***

The Israelites of Jeremiah's day did just that. They looked back and said, ***"Our ancestors were children of Abraham, and we are too."*** And on those laurels they rested -- until Satan came into their complacent hearts and set a new course for them. They certainly needed to hear the truth. God sent Jeremiah to speak it to them.

God help us, members of his modern-day Church, to speak and listen to the truth -- even when it stings us a bit or doesn't agree with the world's ever-changing opinions. Jesus reformed our hearts to be one with his by the power of the Spirit through his Word of truth. He declared us to be holy! May our words and actions match up with what Christ has given us by his grace.

Amen.