

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
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Jeremiah 26:1-6

Why Does God Threaten His People?

- 1. He wants them to have blessings***
- 2. He wants them to avoid destruction***

Hymns: 229 – 337 – 207 (vv. 1,6,7)

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

Jeremiah 26:1-6 –

***Early in the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, this word came from the LORD :
"This is what the LORD says: Stand in the courtyard of the LORD's house and speak to all the people of the towns of Judah who come to worship in the house of the LORD. Tell them everything I command you; do not omit a word. Perhaps they will listen and each will turn from his evil way. Then I will relent and not bring on them the disaster I was planning because of the evil they have done.***

Say to them, 'This is what the LORD says: If you do not listen to me and follow my law, which I have set before you, and if you do not listen to the words of my servants the prophets, whom I have sent to you again and again (though you have not listened), then I will make this house like Shiloh and this city an object of cursing among all the nations of the earth.' "

It happened last school year. It happened on a school bus in Mississippi. Jakobee Brown, a six-year old student at Ida Green Elementary School, came home bloody. He had been harassed on his school bus. What had happened? His mother wanted to know. A 12-year old boy held him down in his seat and told him he wasn't going to let him up until he started crying. He took off Jakobee's socks and shoes and threw them at him. The two were separated, but not before the older boy took Jakobee's pencil. When Jakobee asked for it back, the 12-year old pushed his head into a window and made a gash over his left eye that required stitches. It was a classic case of bullying.

Have you ever been bullied? Perhaps you can remember a bully from your school days. Maybe you have a relative that likes to have things their way, so they get loud and boisterous and push people around until they get exactly what they want. But threatening people is not acceptable behavior!

How did you feel when we read the OT lesson for today, which serves as our sermon text? Was God threatening his people through the prophet Jeremiah? Would God really do this? Is this acceptable behavior from God? **Let's take a closer look at the circumstances surrounding what God tells Jeremiah to preach, and see two reasons God speaks as he does!**

1 – We read, “*This word came from the LORD: ‘Stand in the courtyard of the LORD’s house and speak to all the people of the towns of Judah who come to worship in the house of the LORD. Tell them everything I command you; do not omit a word.’*” Let’s set the scene here. God tells Jeremiah to go preach at the Temple. You might remember that there was a large courtyard around the Temple building. In the OT, the people were not allowed to go into the Temple itself. Only the priests could. (This was commanded by God to show how sin had separated mankind from him, and the problem had not yet been taken care of) Many people obviously would gather there. This was also a momentous time, the beginning of the reign of a new king, Jehoiakim, whose father King Josiah had followed the ways of the Lord. Jeremiah is to tell those gathered for worship that God will bring judgment on them if they do not follow his ways. God even says he will make their city of Jerusalem an object of cursing!

Here’s where we may wonder about God’s strong words. Is God a threatening bully? Could he be guilty of sinning in an impatient, threatening way? Let’s set the record straight! Our Lord commits no wrong, and we can quote Bible passages that talk about his patience and forgiveness. In Exodus 34, the Lord correctly called himself “*the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and*

forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.” God wants to forgive, and he stands ready to do it!

So, why would he speak this way? God said, *“Perhaps they will listen and each will turn from his evil way.”* Simply put, he had good intentions. Under Moses and Joshua, hundreds of years earlier, the Lord had told them, “Follow my ways! If you do, I have tremendous blessings for you in this Promised Land I am giving you. Your crops will be plentiful. Your wives will be the mothers of many children. Your enemies will not triumph over you. And I will be your God and save you. But if you don’t, your life will have great troubles and you will be walking down a path to destruction.” The rest of the OT is a tragic story of how they did not follow the ways of the Lord, but rejected him for false gods of the nations around them. At the time of Jeremiah, their spiritual health was in critical condition!

To get a taste of how things had gone, listen to what God says earlier to Jeremiah:

- *“The Lord said to me (Jeremiah), ‘Have you seen what faithless Israel has done? She has gone up on every high hill and under every spreading tree and has committed adultery (by their false worship of other gods). I thought that after she had done all this she would return to me but she did not.’” (3:6-7)*
- Another time: *“(The LORD said), ‘Go up and down the streets of Jerusalem, look around and consider, search through her squares. If you can find but one person who deals honestly and seeks the truth, I will forgive this city. Although they say, ‘As surely as the LORD lives,’ still they are swearing falsely.’” (5:1-2)*
- Here is what Jeremiah had previously been commanded to preach: *“If you really change your ways and deal with each other justly, if you do not oppress the (foreigner), the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, then I will let you live in this place. Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and*

perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods, and then come and stand before me in this house, and say, ‘We are safe’? I have been watching! declares the LORD.” (7:5-11,30-31)

The Israelites had big problems! Problems with:

- Worshiping dirty gods
- Lying
- Swearing
- Oppressing the weak
- Adultery
- Perjury
- Stealing
- Murder
- Even human sacrifice!

And Jeremiah spoke these things to the people who were the worshipers! They were one-day-a-week Christians. These people had false prophets telling them, “Everything will be fine! Don’t worry about it!”

These people could be compared to a teenager who drives his dad’s car 100 mph. There is real danger here, but they think it’s a blast! Why would a parent speak to their teenager who drives like that? First and foremost, they want them to live! They want them to be safe. God has the same concept in mind. Other verses of the OT show this good motive so clearly:

- *“Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live.” (Isaiah 55:3)*
- *“Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed and get a new heart. (Ezekiel 18:30-31)*

In fact, God had in mind to send them a Messiah to win their salvation. Through their race, Jesus Christ was to come into the world to die for their sins and win them eternal life. **God, had their good in mind and told them, “This is dangerous! Stop right now! I want you to live!” He has blessings to give his OT people!!**

What if someone were preaching a message in our parking lot on Sunday morning?

“Repent of the sins in your life! There is great destruction ahead if you do not!” What if that preacher came up close to you? Would you be surprised? Would you be offended? Some of our members might be ready to tell that person he’s in the wrong place! There’s no need to tell that to perfect church members like ours!

Or is there a need? We might wonder about that preacher’s approach, but what if we would examine our lives for the things that Jeremiah had to speak to the Israelites about? Are we guilty of becoming nonchalant over:

- Worshiping other gods in our hearts? (Money? Ourselves?)
- Using God’s name carelessly?
- Adultery?
- Lying? (even fibs!)
- Not respecting authority?
- Hating/holding grudges?
- Cheating?
- Being a selfish spouse?
- Picking on the weak?
- Going through the motions in worship, but not even remembering what last week’s sermon might have been about?
- Not witnessing?
- Being a one-day-a-week Christian?

And then we say, “It’s alright!” as the false prophets of Jeremiah’s day?

Today God must tell us also, “Stop! I want you to live!” I have so much forgiveness to give in my Son Jesus’ death and resurrection! Your sin has been paid for! I want you to live!” May we listen!

2 — God has a second thought for us to consider before this text concludes. It is not a pretty thought. He said, *“If you do not listen to the words of my servants the prophets, whom I have sent to you again and again (though you have not listened), then I will make this house like*

Shiloh and this city an object of cursing among all the nations of the earth.”

God had first told Jeremiah, “I want my people to live!” Now he tells them all, “I don’t want you to die!” There would be those in Jeremiah’s day who would say that God was exaggerating, that he would certainly not do bad things to people simply because they defied him. But here God says, “Look what I did to Shiloh.”

Do you remember what happened at Shiloh? Shiloh was the first worship place in the Promised Land after the Israelites entered it. The worship tabernacle was set up here, and the Ark of the Covenant remained here a long time. But in the course of Israel’s unbelief, God had abandoned this place, the tabernacle was long gone, and in fact, the city was in ruins. God says they should go look and see what can happen!

I remember when I was taking Driver’s Ed in high school. It was the classroom requirement for getting my driver’s license. I remember that our instructor showed us a video of car wreck where they were attending to people who had been in accidents. Why would our teacher do that? It wasn’t from some peculiar fascination with blood and carnage, but it was a lesson to us in the dangers of driving recklessly. We had been taught the joys and blessings of being a responsible driver, but he also wanted to show us the dangers of driving recklessly.

God gives his OT people a little “video” of the tragedy of Shiloh! He had other “videos” to show, if he wanted to:

- Cherubim and a flaming sword outside the Garden of Eden
- The Flood
- Sodom and Gomorrah

Why does he talk this way to his people? **He doesn’t want them to die eternally!**

As we hear these words today, we must admit that this is also the final result for those who don’t repent of their pet sins and confess them, people who are even churchgoers. Some people

today philosophically wonder, “Since Jesus has already died for all sin, why couldn’t God just ignore unrepented sin? Why couldn’t he look the other way?”

The answer is that God is too perfect. He can’t do this because it goes against his very root quality that he is fair and just. He would cease to be himself if he did this! And he would cease to be holy and perfect also, for this would not be right.

Many parents have struggled with being too “soft.” Perhaps they can’t bring themselves to properly discipline their children or follow through. Or maybe they don’t even want to know what their child is up to. But in doing this, deep down they ought to know they have fallen short in assessing a punishment to change their child’s sinful behavior. They know they’ve fallen short as a parent. God does not fall short, as earthly parents sometimes do. The punishment is always issued. But as he tells Jeremiah, he doesn’t want them to die for their sin! Therefore, our amazement today should not be that God would punish people who are not sorry for their sin and who do not believe in him. Our amazement should be that:

- 1) God would love us enough to fix the problem by sending his Son to die for us
- 2) God would love us enough to tell us in a loving way that he doesn’t want us to die

God says today: **“Please live! Don’t die!”**

As we close our look at God’s blunt words today, we should talk about the result of Jeremiah’s sermon. We read in Jeremiah 26 that Jeremiah was surrounded by an angry mob and seized. He was threatened by the religious leaders, but eventually he was released. It seems there was a mixed reaction to his sermon. Unfortunately, the Israelites as a whole were sent into exile for their unbelief not far into the future.

What is our reaction today? Negative or positive? **For as God speaks tough words today, he has two things in mind:**

- 1. He wants his people to have blessings**
- 2. He wants his people to avoid destruction**

May we turn from our sinful ways and repent of them. And instead of being what God might term a one-day-a-week Christian, may we serve him with our whole life out of thanks for saving us! And in heaven, may we look back at our parent who showed “tough love,” and praise him. Praise God for his love and his honesty! Amen.