

Jeremiah 19:20 – 20:6

Speaking Truth Amidst Lies

1. Terror on every side turns into...
2. Strength on every side

The truth hurts. I don't think any truer words can be spoken. Why is that? Because so many times the truth comes in the form of bad news. There are a couple of ways the truth hurts. The truth hurts when we are on the receiving end of the horrible truth. The truth hurts when the doctor tells you, or your parent, or your children that they have cancer. The truth hurts when your boss tells you the company is downsizing and they have to lay you off. The truth hurts when a spouse or loved one tells you they don't love you anymore. We don't want to hear those things. We don't want to hear the truth when we know it will hurt so much. As much as it hurts being on the receiving end of the truth, it might be just as painful being on the giving end of that truth. Giving people the truth when you know it's going to rock them to the core is not easy to do. Giving people the truth might hurt because you know they're not going like it all. Giving people truth hurts sometimes because you know along with it, there might be some backlash, rejection, or worse yet, threats. That is especially true when you're dealing with the truth of God's Word.

Living in 21st century America as people who claim to have the truth of God's word is hard. Living in a postmodern world which tells there is no such thing as absolute truth, as people who claim to have absolute truth, is hard. And I'm not trying to throw a pity-party for Christians. I'm not saying, "woe is me for having the truth of God's Word!" Having God's truth is hard, because God's truth hurts. Speaking God's truth is hard, because God's truth hurts. It hurts the atheist who laughs at even the thought of a superior being. It hurts the religious person who thinks their deeds play a major role in their eternal relationship with God. It's hard to speak God's truth, because if we claim to have the absolute truth of God's word, we're claiming that everything that goes against it is a lie. Speaking the truth amidst lies is difficult because it seems like everything around us and in us is telling us to keep God's "truth" to ourselves- to keep it tucked away. Today we take a lesson from Jeremiah. He spoke God's truth amidst lies. And you'll find out the more you speak truth amidst lies, with God's help, the terror you feel on every side of you will turn into strength on every side.

I don't envy the prophet Jeremiah. Sometimes we might think how awesome it would be to be a prophet of God. I get to talk directly to God! I get to tell people what God told me to tell them! But when you go through Jeremiah's life and when you go through what he had to tell the people of Israel, you might think again. There's a reason why he's called the "weeping prophet." Most of what he had to tell the people of Judah was bad news. He had to bring people the news of judgment. God was going to bring them into captivity of the Babylonians. He had to call people out on their sins, not just people who wanted nothing to do with the idea of God, but he went to the center of the Jewish worship life. He confronted people who came to the temple, who worked in the temple, but who were defiling the house of God. So he goes to the temple court, and he shouts out what God wants the people to hear: **"This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of**

Israel, says: ‘Listen! I am going to bring on this city and all the villages around it every disaster I pronounced against them, because they were stiff-necked and would not listen to my words.’” (Jer 19:15)

How do you think the people received that? I’d like to think that their ears perked up and they thought, “maybe we should get our act together”, but I have to think otherwise when the priest who was in charge of the temple comes up and has Jeremiah beaten and put into the stocks for everybody to mock and ridicule. He was set up as an example. If you have terrible news to share with us then you’re going to end up like that guy. At that point you wouldn’t blame Jeremiah for just hanging up the jersey and saying, “ok, I’ll be out of your hair Judah. I’m out of here.” But no. With sheer terror coming from every direction, he stands up to Pashhur the priest and gives him the truth of God’s word. Jeremiah gave him truth that probably hurt him to speak and hurt Pashhur to hear. Instead of shuddering away he tells Pashhur **“The LORD’s name for you is not Pashhur, but Magor Misageev,”** (Jer 20:3) Magor Misageev means “Terror on Every Side.” That was his new name. Definitely not on the top ten in Hebrew baby names. But Jeremiah explains to him why the Lord gave him this new name, **“For this is what the LORD says: ‘I will make you a terror to yourself and to all your friends; with your own eyes you will see them fall by the sword of their enemies. I will give all Judah into the hands of the king of Babylon, who will carry them away to Babylon or put them to the sword...And you, Pashhur, and all who live in your house will go into exile to Babylon. There you will die and be buried, you and all your friends to whom you have prophesied lies.’”** (Jer 10:4,6) Pashhur would be a terror, not only to Jeremiahs, but to his own people because of how he responded to God’s word of Truth. He responded to the truth with nothing but lies.

Of course we look to Jeremiah’s example. Even when he has terror on every side, he boldly speaks truth amidst all the lies. But before we look at speaking the truth of God’s Word, let’s examine how we receive the speaking of truth. How would we handle what Jeremiah said? How do we handle the truth of God’s law? Because every single week we stand up here and we tell you you’re a sinner not living up to God’s standard of perfection. At the beginning of the service we remind you that you deserve God’s punishment in hell. In the sermon we point out specific sins you have done in your life that have disappointed God. How do you handle it? Because it hurts when we hear the truth that we are wretched sinners deserving of God’s punishment. And it doesn’t help when there are lies coming into your hearts and minds. It doesn’t help when terror is on every side of you trying to tell you to reject the truth. How do you handle it? Do you handle it by hearing a specific sin and looking around the room at other people because obviously the pastor wasn’t talking about you? Do you handle it by allowing the world to convince you that our church is crazy for even suggesting that one sin can send a person to hell? Do you handle it by letting the devil whisper in your ear that you’re fine the way you are? We’re surrounded by lies. We have terror on every side. We have so many road blocks to our repentance. Where do we go?

We go back to God’s truth. We humbly fall to our knees at the Word of God. Because we have to realize that the bad news of the truth of God’s law is better than worse news that awaits us in

hell. It hurts us in the best possible way because God's truth pierces our hearts of hypocrisy, and envy, and pride, and leads us to the only thing that heals us - the good news. We look at God's law and lose all hope in ourselves and we look to Jesus for rescue and pardon. Jesus reminds us that he **is the way the truth and the life, and that this truth will set us free.** (Jn 14:6) That terror we feel on every side turns into strength on every side. The terror we feel on every side when our sinful nature that tells us we haven't been good enough to enter heaven turns into the strength of Jesus who's kept God's law perfectly in our place. The terror we feel on every side when the sinful world that tells us that God could never forgive us turns into the strength of Jesus who died for every sin of every sinner in the world. We go to the truth of the good news and realize that Jesus did absolutely everything we couldn't do and that he is our strength that surrounds us. We receive the speaking of the truth with open arms.

And now we speak truth amidst all the lies and terror that surround us. It's easier said than done. It's not easy to speak boldly like Jeremiah especially when you know that the truth will hurt. But it's ok. Because Jeremiah had that same fear. Right after he says those tough words to Pashur, he laments. He feels the terror on every side and cries out to God,

**“You deceived me, LORD, 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. (Jer 20:7,8)**

That's how we feel. We feel as though speaking God's truth will get us absolutely nowhere. How do I keep going when no matter how much I teach God's truth to that person who doesn't believe in a god they never seem to budge. How do I keep going when I try to lovingly confront a fellow believer in their sin to try to bring them back to the truth but all they can say to me is that I'm a judgmental hypocrite? How can I continue speaking truth when all this terror is on every side of me? Listen to Jeremiah:

**But if I say, “I will not mention his word
or speak anymore 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. (Jer 20:9)**

You see what he's saying? The way terror on every side turns into strength on every side is realizing whose word and truth we're really speaking. It's God's word. When we want to give up speaking his word; when we want to give up even mentioning his name, his word is in our hearts

like a fire. It's a fire that cannot be contained. We cannot hold it in. We join in the apostles when we say, "**As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.**" (Acts 4:20) We follow Jesus words when he tells that what we hear in secret we proclaim it on the rooftops. Terror on every side turns into strength on every side we grasp how the news of Jesus and his love for us has changed our lives and we want it to change the lives even of those who reject it now.

I was just recently in an intense conversation with someone who was a very religious person. However, he rejected the idea that there's absolutely nothing we have to do to earn our salvation. In essence then, he rejected the idea that Jesus has done it all. And so I tried as lovingly but as firmly as could to speak truth - not my own truth, but truth that can only come from God's Word. And I kept reverting back to what God says in his Word, and at one point he started to say he was feeling a little judged, and maybe a little offended that I was saying that he was wrong. And I tried and tried to make him understand that it was God's Word that was disagreeing with him. At one point I answered one of his questions by saying, "well that's what the Bible says." To which he replied, "well that's an easy fall back." To which I thought, "that's the only fall back!"

We have the amazing gift of God's very word. It's the only thing that we can use in our fight with the lies of the world. We have something that gives us strength on every side. So study it. Immerse yourself in it. Join a Bible reading plan. Memorize some verses to use in discussions. Let people know how it's changed your life. Let people know that this truth of Jesus has set you free.

Amen.