

Rejected for Being Faithful

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Date: 09 February 2020

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[0 : 0 0] And thank you, John Angus, for leading the service. Thanks to Nick this morning. God willing, we'll get through the service in his strength.

Turn with me again to Jeremiah chapter 11. Jeremiah 11, and particularly I want to focus on verses 18 to 23.

We're on page, in the Bible, page 640. These words that begin, the Lord made it known to me, and I knew that you showed me their deeds. But I was like a gentle lamb, led to the slaughter.

I did not know it was against me. They devised schemes. And in our evening services, certainly the ones that I've been preaching over the last few weeks, we're looking at different aspects in the life of the prophet Jeremiah.

Jeremiah, a man, as most of you know, a man whom God chose from, certainly from all eternity, but God spoke to from an early age that Jeremiah be God's messenger at a particularly turbulent time in the history of the people of Judah.

[1 : 1 3] That nation, the nation of Judah, its capital, Jerusalem. That nation that from the top of society, right through the ranks of society, that nation that had wandered far from the one through God.

The nation that was in utter spiritual decline. And Jeremiah, given that task to give God's word, to give that prophetic warning to the people, to stand at the crossroads, as we saw a few weeks ago, stand at the crossroads.

To stand where they were in their existence as a nation, as a people before God. And God giving Jeremiah the word to give to the people, to ask for the good ways. Ask for the good way.

Ask for that path that would lead to peace with God. That path that people must walk in to obtain their eternal safety.

But what did we notice in Jeremiah chapter 6? We noticed that the response of the people was a tragic response. They would not walk in the way that God showed them.

[2 : 2 1] And the verdict was they were not willing. They were not willing. It's the same conclusion that we see when Jesus cried out over Jerusalem. When he cried out, Jerusalem, Jerusalem.

How often I would have gathered you as a hen gathers her brood under her wings. But you were not willing. It's the same verdict we see today.

So frequently, so prevalently. You see today in today's world. The opportunities are there. The word is proclaimed. The word given to repent of your sins.

To listen to the call of Jesus to come to me. All you who labour and are heavy laden and I'll give you rest. The spiritual tragedy is seen all around us.

The verdict. Not willing. Not willing to give one's life to Jesus. And that tragedy. The tragedy of rejecting the word of God.

[3 : 22] Well it's seen here in the tragedy here of God's messenger being rejected. But more. Not so much God's messenger. But indeed the fact that he is the one who's brought God's word to the people.

That's being rejected. And as we see the same things happening today. Those who are given the message of God's word to proclaim.

And the tragedy of rejection. And those who have nothing to do with the Lord Jesus Christ. And this tragedy of rejection that we see that Jeremiah faced.

He faces it because he's been faithful. He's been absolutely faithful in proclaiming the whole counsel of God. He's been doing as God had given him to do to the people of Judah. And as we'll see that this tragedy of rejection is made all the more horrendous.

All the more serious. When as we'll see that rejection came from his own family. From his own people. From his own townspeople. The town that he grew up in. The town that he was nurtured in.

[4 : 30] It was the people from that town. And we can suggest even from his own family. Who rejected him. And rejected the word that he proclaimed. And it's a rejection that believers through the ages have faced.

And will face. Even in our own families. Even above all Jesus. When he spoke of his being rejected by his own people.

Even in the town that he grew up in. In the town of Nazareth. And he spoke of the prophet being without honour. Even in his own town. And it shouldn't surprise us.

When the Lord's people who have been given the Lord's message are rejected. When the message is rejected. The Lord's people are rejected in our own land. Whether it's in our own towns or villages.

Or wherever we are. Wherever God's people are. Even within our families. Which in many ways is the saddest rejection of all.

[5 : 34] But what about Jeremiah? What do we see? Particularly in relation to his response. To that rejection. Because there's so much we can learn about this.

We have so much to learn about ourselves. When you face that rejection. When the faith that you profess. Is rejected. How do you react to that situation?

Are you going to be as open as Jeremiah was? When he brought before God his perplexity? And what about the way that God responds to the times that Jeremiah was in?

Even to the times that we're in. What do we find? What do we see? In God's response that teaches us. How we are ourselves to respond to these times.

When God's word and God's people are rejected. Well, let's look first of all at verses 18 and 19. The complaint of a prophet. The complaint of a prophet.

[6 : 34] But as John Angus read there in chapter 11. We find that. Certainly verse 21. We find that Jeremiah is from a small town. The small town of Anathoth.

Anathoth is just very near Jerusalem. Just a few miles. Three miles from Jerusalem. The town where Jeremiah was born. The town in which he grew up. Related to many of the people there, of course.

He'd grown up with friends there. Family there. But something was happening in that small town. That at first Jeremiah knew nothing about.

Or certainly knew nothing that was directed against himself. And that something was that he was being plotted against. His unpopular message of judgment to come unless the people repent.

That message didn't go down well with his fellow townspeople. And behind his back, they're plotting his downfall. They're plotting his death. And you see there something from verse 18.

[7 : 35] And you notice in your Bibles the way it's constructed. You see this is very much a poetic form now that we've come against. But even in that poetic style of writing, we see that somehow God had informed Jeremiah probably through an intermediary.

Probably maybe through a friend, maybe through a relative. That Jeremiah hears of this plot. And obviously Jeremiah is aware that something's happening. I mean in a small town, news does travel fast.

But so he's aware that something's happening. But not towards himself until he's been told that he's the target. And you know, he indicates this in this poetic form that shows how unsuspecting he was when he compares himself to a lamb going to the slaughter.

That lamb that has no idea that it's about to be butchered. That it's about to be taken from the flock once and for all. And so this is the Lord's messenger. This is the Lord's prophet.

He's the target of a plot to remove him from the land. Because his message was considered detrimental to the well-being of the people.

[8 : 47] The people who prefer to hear another message. The people who prefer to hear the sugar-sweet words of the false prophets who were saying peace, peace when there was no peace.

And that's happening behind the back of the Lord's man. And that strategy, that stealth, that practice, that backstabbing if you like, that plotting behind the back.

That's the strategy of Satan. You know, seen supremely in scripture where we see the plotting behind Jesus' back.

And of course Jesus is divine. He knew this was happening. But remember, towards the end of Jesus' life on earth. Towards the end of his ministry, the religious leaders were plotting against Jesus.

Jesus had been giving the testimony of himself as the promised Christ. He'd been condemning these self-righteous leaders of the people. And they're so infuriated that they plot to have Jesus removed from their midst.

[9 : 55] As we say, Jesus, unlike Jeremiah, it's like Jesus immediately. He knew what was happening. But that's, you see, the satanic stealth that's evident in all who would seek to remove the Lord Jesus from our land, from our people, from our lives.

Listening again to the words in Matthew 26 of those who plotted against Jesus. The chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and plotted together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him.

Think of the apostle Paul. The apostle Paul, the scourge of those Jews who refused to accept his testimony to the Lord Jesus as the promised Christ, the promised Messiah.

Paul was plotted against. You go to Acts chapter 9. You read from verse 23 that the Jews plotted to kill him. But their plot became known to Paul. God had revealed to him the danger to his life.

And at that point anyway, Paul's life was spared through the protection of his disciples. And that kind of plotting, that organized stealth that, you know, happens behind the back of the Lord's people.

[11 : 14] Well, it happens and will continue to happen. This desire to remove the word of God from our land, to remove the voice of Jesus. Because it's with us today.

It's a present reality. Remember what Jesus said to his disciples. If the world hates you, you know that it hated me first. And if Jesus was hated by his contemporaries, then all who will follow Jesus through the ages, even today, you will know a measure of hatred.

Hatred from those who are of the world. And that hating will be done behind your back. That hating will be done in various degrees of plotting to silence the voice of the servants of the Lord.

You can see examples in the history of God's church. Examples of great men of God who were plotted against because they affirmed the authority of Scripture.

I hope some of you are heroes of the past. One of my heroes of the past is an Englishman, William Tyndale, the English reformer. And he's so infuriated as his opponents because he held that the word of God is the only rule to direct us, how we might glorify and enjoy him.

[12 : 29] And that word has to be read by the people in their own language. And in his life, cunning men, men plotted against Tyndale, did so behind his back.

Even those who pretended to be friends with him actually conspired with Tyndale's enemies. And Tyndale was arrested and he was executed in a small place near Brussels some 500 years ago.

But you don't need to delve into the pages of history. You don't need to go very far back in time to see that that kind of plotting is with us today.

Whether it's a church in Larbert against which there's a coalition of vicious opponents who are seeking to prevent its opening.

Whether it's a coalition of green MSPs and others who prevented an American evangelist coming to speak in Scotland and elsewhere in the country.

[13 : 29] Whether it's the plotting of those who will seek to prevent an Australian rugby player from playing because of his views on biblical morality. Whether it's former tennis champions trying to seek the erasure of a name of a Christian former world class player, Margaret Court, from having her name associated with a court in the Australian Open and so on and so on.

Behind the scenes plotting happening. Yes, and at many times Christians not even aware of it until the Lord makes known these things. Because the devil truly is active in the hearts and minds of those who, well, like the men of Anathoth, were plotting to silence Jeremiah.

And you see there in verse 19, you see just how Jeremiah uses words to express how vicious these plotters were.

These men had, these people had no love for the Lord. They had no love for his people. They had no desire to hear the faithful preaching of the word to be heard in Judah or Jerusalem.

And as we said, the language is poetic, but the meaning is clear. The people of Anathoth wanted the total destruction of the prophet. You see how it's written there in verse 19, let's destroy the tree with its fruit.

[14 : 52] Let's cut them off from the land of the living. And you see that the arrogance of these plotters and the kind of power that they thought they had.

Notice again how they're putting it. Let us, see the emphasis, let us destroy. Let us cut off. It's the same mindset you see in Psalm 2.

You know, those who challenge the Lord and the Lord's anointed. Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us. See the emphasis on let us.

Let us assume an authority that's self-produced against the word of God. Let us take upon ourselves an authority that we deem as correct in order to silence those who proclaim the name of Jesus.

Let us destroy and cut off from this progressive land of Scotland all that would speak words of offence that have no place in our inclusive society, so is said.

[15 : 59] Let us rule with an intolerance of tolerating only that which satisfies a criterion that flies in the face of the Bible. Let us, let us.

So how do you respond to that kind of plotting and hatred? Who do you turn to? Surely we turn, as we all must turn, to the Lord our God.

As Jeremiah turned to God in that particularly perplexing situation, he was perplexed, he was, yes, distressed. But he turned to God.

And you see that, in fact, as we pray we will do over the next few Lord's Day evenings, as Jeremiah did on a number of occasions, he turns to God.

There are six such turnings to God recorded in Jeremiah. This one in chapter 11 being the first one, one of six. Whether we get through all the six, I'm not sure. But certainly we see Jeremiah coming before God, making his complaints before God.

[17 : 02] And we see here, certainly, this complaint or maybe even this petition. This petition of a prophet. O Lord. How does it begin?

Verse 20. But O Lord of hosts. O Lord Almighty. Jeremiah is calling on God, who's infinitely more powerful than his enemies in Anathoth.

O Lord of hosts. O Lord of armies. O Lord of... O Lord Almighty. You who are all-powerful. You who rule the heavens and the earth. You who are above all.

And against whom all else is this nothing. Jeremiah's calling on the one whom he knows. Because he trusts. And he obeys.

And that surely should be a timely reminder for every Christian. For you who believe in the Lord Jesus. And you're seeing the onslaught. And you're aware of all the plots that are happening against the church and against the Lord's people.

[18 : 06] And maybe you're tempted to think that the opponents of truth are far greater than they really are. So when you do hear and when you do see those who are opposing that church plant in Larbert.

Or who proudly proclaim that they've silenced the voice of an American evangelist. Or who condemn an Australian rugby player, Christian player, or tennis legend.

They're not the ones who are in control. God is sovereign. God is in control. And Jeremiah acknowledges that as he begins there his petition. But O Lord of hosts.

Because Jeremiah knows that God is the one who judges righteously. He's the one who has supreme authority in human affairs.

Think of what the Apostle John affirmed. When he said he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. And Jeremiah, here's Jeremiah, God's prophet. Jeremiah has that close walk with God.

[19 : 11] And he knows that God is just. He knows that God's righteous. Jeremiah knows that God's not going to permit these plans and plots of evil men to prevail.

Why? Because as Jeremiah tells us here in verse 20, God knows the heart of man. You see that in verse 20, he tests the heart and the mind.

And that testing, that probing by God, that testing something that Jeremiah is not afraid to petition God to do. God knows those who are plotting against him.

And Jeremiah is petitioning God. Let me see your vengeance upon them for to you I've committed my cause. Now there's a lot going on here.

Think about Jeremiah. Jeremiah. He's pleading to God. For God to exercise his justice. God's righteous justice against his enemies.

[20 : 10] Now, on the one hand, you can see Jeremiah is pleading his own integrity. He's pleading that he's innocent in the matter. I mean, he's not claiming any kind of perfection. No, but he's saying, Lord, I'm bringing a case before you.

Just, you know, just as someone will bring a case before a human judge. Jeremiah is saying, I'm the innocent one here. I've done no wrong in speaking forth your word. But I'm pleading for your justice.

That your justice will prevail and that you'll act justly in vengeance against those who are guilty of sinning against you. And you might be asking at this point, is Jeremiah right to ask for such justice, such vengeance on those who are plotting against him?

Some people might say, well, isn't this just vindictive? Isn't this just cruel to, a cruel way to speak against fellow humanity? But, but is it? Well, let's look at the facts.

And let's even see how we can apply this to the church's situation today. Well, look at the facts. And we have to say, first of all, that Jeremiah is utterly consistent with Scripture.

[21 : 19] He knows his Bible. In fact, in many ways we can say he's echoing Psalm 7. The words of Psalm 7 when David was hounded by his enemy. And David pleaded his innocence in the matter.

And David called on God to exercise God's righteous anger against the person who'd been wronging him. And David was so confident in God's justice that David, you read in Psalm 7, says, My shield is with God who saves the upright in heart.

And David's expressing his confidence, as Jeremiah was doing, that he, in this case, is innocent. He's the upright one in heart. God will save him from his enemy.

But in contrast, the one who doesn't repent of his sins, David says, God will punish him. But then you might be asking, well, what about the whole matter of forgiveness? Shouldn't Jeremiah just have forgiven his enemies?

But that kind of question totally misses the point. This is exactly echoing what Janangus was saying earlier in relation to the second part of Psalm 37 that we were saying.

[22 : 25] Because Jeremiah isn't calling on God to exercise some kind of vengeance on Jeremiah's behalf. No, Jeremiah's calling on vengeance from God because it's God's word.

That's ultimately being opposed. Jeremiah has been given the word of God to give to the people. Jeremiah is God's prophet. Jeremiah is God's messenger.

And the people in rejecting Jeremiah, in fact, have been rejecting the word of God. And in rejecting the word of God, have been rejecting God. These people that are trying to destroy Jeremiah are actually trying to silence the voice of God and his word from the land.

So Jeremiah is seeking the justice of God. He's seeking righteous justice. That justice that upholds God's holiness. And it's God's holiness, you see, that's been rejected.

And it's only right then that Jeremiah should plead that God show that he's a just God. And so punish those who've rejected God and his word.

[23 : 34] And, you know, for the Christian today, he'll continue, she'll continue to, yes, to seek God's justice against all who would seek to silence the word of God.

It's only right that Christians should seek justice for the oppressed who have been persecuted for righteousness' sake. It's only right that Christians should seek God's righteous justice to be seen and to be exercised.

When there are the many who are willfully and persistently seeking to remove the name of God and the word of God and the name of Jesus from every aspect of our society. It's not personal vengeance.

Never, ever let it be the case that there's any kind of seeking of personal vengeance. No, it's seeking God's intervention when his holiness has been mocked and abused.

We're not going to seek any personal vengeance if you're mocked, if I'm mocked for being a Christian. Even when I'm mocked within my own family as you, I'm sure many of you are yourself. You leave that to God.

[24 : 38] As God says, it's mine to avenge. I will repay. Of course, his justice is seen ultimately in judgment. So, what of God's response to Jeremiah's petition before him, as you see there in verse 21 to 23?

Well, the first thing to say is this. God's not going to be mocked. God will punish. He doesn't do it immediately. But he will cause his judgment to come on those, even there in Jeremiah's hometown, who threatened Jeremiah, who called him to stop prophesying in God's name.

God will exercise his justice in his own time for his own sake. And so, the point's clear. All who mock God and refuse to repent, all who reject his word and refuse to come to him as Lord and Savior, you must know it.

They must know that they're accountable to him, to the God of justice. Now, we know, and you know, I know, that God's justice, God's judgment isn't a very popular theme.

But we have to say, this is, we see it through Scripture. It's one of the threads that runs through Scripture. You go to the fall of Adam and Eve. God declared a sentence of death on them because they disobeyed his word.

[26 : 07] And he evicted them from the Garden of Eden. And you see the many instances through Scripture when God punishes his people who disobeyed him when they worshipped other gods. And you see a Scripture right through to the book of Revelation, the judgment on the end of the world, when the Lord Jesus returns and exercises justice as Christ the Judge.

And remember, Jesus himself faced the justice of God when he became sin for us, when he took your place, my place, when he faced the wrath of God against sin.

Jesus took what you and I deserve from that judgment of God for our sins. Jesus paid that price with his life so that you might have everlasting life.

And, you know, when we think of this language of judgment, people balk at this. This language of judgment and punishment. But again, we have to come back to this truth that God is a righteous judge.

We read in Ezekiel 33, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Now, the people in Jeremiah's day, they had ample opportunity to turn from their evil ways and live.

[27 : 24] They'd been given God's word by God's prophet. But they'd rejected that word. And their hearts wouldn't respond in repentance. And they wouldn't turn back to the one true God.

As we noted at the start of our sermon, exactly as Jesus declared, when the people of Jerusalem rejected him. And he spoke in sorrow of that rejection.

And for the rejection of Jesus, judgment, righteous judgment, must follow. Jeremiah was living in a society that God had blessed abundantly with God's word.

I mean, God had blessed the people with his prophets. He'd blessed his people with his covenant faithfulness. But God was rejected. And Jeremiah suffered for that rejection.

Think of Scotland. God has blessed this nation of Scotland with the blessings of his word. He's blessed the people of Scotland with his church.

[28 : 33] He's given this people a historic heritage that, you know, people from outside this country look upon with awe. But we've abandoned these blessings for a wordless, Christless, godless, self-righteous religion of man.

And we pray, we must pray, that God will restore us and revive us. And that God will bring us back to himself. And that he'll spare his judgment from us as a people who've known so much blessing from his hand.

And yet have rejected so much. And our focus on our human-centered mindset that rejects the authority of God's word. We were once known as a nation of the books.

Christians in parts of Scotland were known as the people of the great faith. But we've wandered. We've backslidden. We've turned our backs on God.

But we still pray, Lord, be merciful to us as sinners. Lord, be merciful to me as sinners. Lord, avert your judgment upon us as a people. Lord, restore us to yourself that we might still rejoice in you.

[29 : 50] And these are strange times we're living in. These are difficult times. We're living in times not unlike Jeremiah's day. We're living in these difficult times. But we still pray that, as the psalmist prayed in Psalm 30, that God will turn our mourning into dancing.

And that God will look upon us in mercy. And that God will save us from our sins. And so we pray that God will be merciful.

That God will restore us. And that God will look upon us in his grace and in his love. Amen. May God be blessed. Let us pray.

Lord, we come before you as a righteous judge. As the righteous judge. We come before you as the Lord of hosts.

The Lord who is the Almighty One. We come before you, Lord, confessing our sins. The sins of our hearts. The sins of our minds. The sins of our words.

[30 : 55] Our individual sins and our corporate sins. We confess before you that we have fallen short of the standard that you have set. And so, Lord, we pray that truly you will be merciful towards us.

Lord, bless your church. Bless your people. Bless your servants. Bless all who proclaim your name. Even in difficult circumstances. We pray again for the likes of Nick and Norman and Govan who face so much before them.

But we pray, Lord, that you will bless their work there. We bless for your servants in different parts of the world who uphold your name. And are tortured and imprisoned for their faith.

And so, Lord, we pray that you will let your light shine upon us. That you will bless us and keep us. And make your face to shine upon us. And keep us safe.

And that you will have the glory. As we pray these things. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Well, let's close in Psalm 25.

[32 : 06] On page 30 for Psalm books. Psalm 25. And we'll sing from verse 14 to the end. God's friends are those who fear his name with them his covenant he will share mine eyes are always in the Lord he'll free my feet from every snare turn to me Lord show me your grace I suffer pain and loneliness the troubles of my heart have grown deliver me from my distress 14 to 22 Psalm 25 to God's praise