

Series: Jeremiah: Faith During Opposition	Reference: Jeremiah 38:1-6	Title: Bad News/Good News	Date: 08.29.2021
Website Writeup: Will we recognize that sometimes bad news is good news bringing God's healing? Will we answer in faith as Jeremiah did at his worst hour with no support from anyone?			

COLOR CHANGES IN TEXT INDICATE SLIDE CHANGES

Let's read Jeremiah 38:1–6 found on p546 of your pew Bibles... *Shephatiah son of Mattan, Gedaliah son of Pashhur, Jehukal son of Shelemiah, and Pashhur son of Malkijah heard what Jeremiah was telling all the people when he said, ²“This is what the Lord says: ‘Whoever stays in this city will die by the sword, famine or plague, but whoever goes over to the Babylonians will live. They will escape with their lives; they will live.’ ³And this is what the Lord says: ‘This city will certainly be given into the hands of the army of the king of Babylon, who will capture it.’”*

⁴Then the officials said to the king, “This man should be put to death. He is discouraging the soldiers who are left in this city, as well as all the people, by the things he is saying to them. This man is not seeking the good of these people but their ruin.” ⁵“He is in your hands,” King Zedekiah answered. “The king can do nothing to oppose you.” ⁶So they took Jeremiah & put him into the cistern of Malkijah, the king's son, which was in the courtyard of the guard. They lowered Jeremiah by ropes into the cistern; it had no water in it, only mud, and Jeremiah sank down into the mud.

Let's pray... **When bad news is good news, it needs to be heeded.** What feels like destruction may actually be for God's healing. The question is...**Are we open to God destroying things in or around us to make way for His healing?** Are we open to correction - willing to experience the consequences of sin in order to experience God's redemptive healing? These are the questions we wrestle with today.

Think of Jeremiah's scenario...you're young, didn't want this calling, but you got it. It's not your enemies personally attacking you, but your own people. Your stuck in a well, left to die. Your faithful proclamation of God's Word led to this. Isn't it time to give up? Hasn't God lost & therefore you should just quit or die?

Let me set the scene. The Babylonians were on siege against Jerusalem & it's not looking good. Jeremiah was preaching surrender or die, not because the Babylonians were so powerful, but he'd proclaimed God had brought this about as a consequence of Israel's stubborn refusal to repent & turn from their sinful ways. "To understand why Jeremiah's words made people mad, it helps to understand how desperate the situation was in Jerusalem. The city was under siege [for a few years by this point]. The most powerful military force in the world, the Babylonian army, was camped outside its walls, cutting off all supplies. Bread rations ran low & there's only brackish mud left in the cisterns.

Very likely, the Babylonians had started to attack the walls of the city, trying to undermine its towers or knock down its gates with battering rams. The prophet Ezekiel offered this grim depiction, “Outside is the sword, inside are plague & famine; those in the country will die by the sword, and those in the city will be devoured by famine & plague” (7:15). One way or another, the citizens were doomed.”¹

It’s not hard to figure out why this ‘Gang of Four’ which we’ll call them (Shephatiah, Gedaliah, Jehukal & Pashhur) were so upset. They were patriots trying to defend their homeland & Jeremiah was hurting the war effort with his ‘defeatist attitude’. When they heard what Jeremiah was preaching, they cried “Treason!” The question is, was their accusation true? Listen again to the charge they leveled against Jeremiah... “*This man is not seeking the good (shalom) of these people but their ruin (destruction)*” (v. 4). Was Jeremiah a traitor to God’s people, or not? Was he seeking their ruin, or their good?

News of divine judgment is always bad news. It’s unpleasant to hear God punishes sin rather than overlooks it. But the only thing which really matters is whether or not the bad news of divine judgment is true. And when bad news is God’s news, it needs to be heeded.²

We often struggle with the idea that sins have consequences, we’ve been forgiven in Christ, why should there be? But just like blueberries leave a stain on a white shirt, our sins leave their mark. Although they do not cut us off from God’s saving grace, they do relationally alienate us from God, ourselves, or others & usually all three. They have implications in every area of life. We all know of someone who’s lost a job, spouse, or opportunity due to sinful choices sometimes even years after the fact. One pastor admitted to a sexual relationship with a 17 year old girl in his former church where he was a youth pastor at 22 years old, which was 19 years earlier. He admitted wrong & seemed contrite, but diminished his guilt by saying it was consensual & eventually lost his job.³ Sin has consequences & Jeremiah takes the difficult position of proclaiming that truth. Those consequences can serve as correction for those not responding to God well.

Let’s think about our characters. We have Jeremiah faithfully fulfilling God’s call, speaking the Words of God to people who need to hear them, although it’s unwelcome. We have The Gang of Four, fellow Jews who seem to have been party to the sinfulness of Judah & just want to go back to the way it was, although that was not glorifying to God. We have King Zedekiah, obviously defeated, not acting in a kingly manner, the coward who bows to any pressure. Then we know, from extended reading, we have those who’d defected to Babylon, totally giving up on their faith & way of life, the Fearful, letting fear & circumstance dictate faith & belief.

¹ Philip Graham Ryken, *Jeremiah and Lamentations: From Sorrow to Hope*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 570.

² Philip Graham Ryken, *Jeremiah and Lamentations: From Sorrow to Hope*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 571.

³ <https://christandpopculture.com/church-needs-masterclass-apologize-sexual-assault/>

Likewise, I preach to four different people today. Last week Natalie asked whether we felt scattered, lost & stuck, like everything's falling apart. Maybe some of us aren't reading signs well & defecting to Babylon. The words of the faithful around us, still preaching God's Truth, sound now like hopeless bigotry. We want to give up, give in, compromise & not be forced to have faith in our dark situation. Our solution to bad news is capitulation - to agree with the Enemy. To assimilate into a changing culture & to give up on that to which God calls.

A recent **article** outlines a survey, including more than 3,000 Americans between age 18 & 55, which revealed that born-again Protestants experienced the greatest level of decline in Bible-based beliefs from 2010 to 2020. During that decade, the percentage of people who agreed with core Christian doctrines fell from 47% to 25% (among younger people, it's worse). Although people may label themselves as born-again Christians, says Anderson, they still *"can have a false view of Jesus Christ & embrace a pluralistic worldview."* It also said, *"among U.S. born-again Christians between age 18 & 39, more than 60% say there's more than one way to salvation, including Jesus, Buddha & Muhammad. More than 30% say Jesus sinned while living on earth or they're not sure whether he did."* This is the Progressive Christian, defecting to Babylon, giving up on orthodoxy led by fear & peer pressure instead of God's Word.

There's a great example of the Progressive Christian mindset in the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, D.C., Thomas Jefferson's Bible, in which large sections are cut out. Enlightenment thinkers thought the morality of Jesus was great, but the academic world had turned against any kind of belief in miracles; it was considered unfashionable & uneducated. So, Jefferson literally cut out every supernatural passage in the New Testament so he could have a Bible with just Jesus' moral teachings.⁴ Today we cut out the morality passages as well, leaving only concepts of justice & love (which do not work without the others BTW).

Maybe we're like King Zedekiah. We've tuned out, grown weary, tired, and lay down our responsibility to lead out of fear of man & exhaustion. For them the solution to bad news is to crawl into our shell, go back to bed, to seek escape. Walking in faith in dark times seems so overwhelming & tiring - no longer courageous, we've become the coward.

Maybe we're like The Gang of Four, trying desperately to guard the status quo, not wanting to hear words of faith which speak of, and bring change, calling us to lean into the darkness with faith even when it seems impossible. These guys wanted to hear that God would deliver them, despite their sin & without the consequences God promised. Even though in facing them, He was still extending grace - they'd be taken over, but would "escape with their lives." These guys opposing Jeremiah claimed to be most concerned about protecting the people, but it's ironic "they should profess concern for

⁴ https://outreachmagazine.com/features/discipleship/68737-why-we-cant-edit-our-faith.html?utm_source=SC-meta&utm_medium=email&utm_content=text&utm_campaign=SC-meta-&maropost_id=743804115

the peace & welfare of the citizens whom they actually insisted on sacrificing.”⁵ These are the Pious Christians living a secret sin life, not wanting to admit they’d brought destruction on themselves by refusing to repent.

Or, maybe we could be like Jeremiah, stuck in the mud at the bottom of a dark cistern looking up at only a small circle of light over his head after having followed God faithfully through a lot of heartache. Who’d blame him for giving up? But he didn’t - he continued to preach God’s Word even from his dark place, and would see salvation as later he’s pulled from the cistern to continue ministry. It was Jeremiah who most wanted to see the peace & prosperity (29:7) of his people.

Which are you today? The Progressive Christian giving up on orthodoxy out of fear, simply following feeling, capitulating to culture. The tired worn out Christian embracing cowardice in the face of difficulty? The Pious Christian living a secret sin life, not wanting to admit we've brought destruction on ourselves by refusing to repent. Or, the Jeremiah’s, showing courage in a dark time, knowing when bad news is actually good, it needs to be heeded, even when it means enduring the consequences of our sin?

Jeremiah’s response to God’s call on his life & this particular message he’d been given isn’t what many of us would do. One commentator said, “Given the conflict of the world, given the sure promise of his call, one might expect the prophet could withdraw from combat (in the world) for communion (with his God). But the neat consignment of combat to earth and communion to heaven does not hold here”⁶ Isn’t that what we do when things get tough in relational ministry, we navel gaze. We lock ourselves away telling ourselves the fuzzy feel good things of faith, denying God’s called us to the front lines of spiritual battle. We send memes from our Bible app, which we saw in our morning quiet time over coffee & a danish - but we avoid opening our mouths to proclaim God’s truth to others when it becomes difficult.

But just as Jeremiah encouraged his people to plant roots in their exile in 29:4–7, (which wouldn’t have been comfortable leaving your own culture, language & life becoming a second class citizen of another people) his willingness to stick it out & keep repeating unpopular news is indicative of deep faith in a God who can use suffering & difficulty in life for good.

Christians in Afghanistan face this right now in a way probably most of us won’t! It’d be easy to capitulate, deny Christ & give into the Taliban. To cower & hide, or pack & run. Or fight for political rights & die in battle? However, one Christian man put out a video describing their situation, saying, “We’re not leaving the field. We...will continue in God’s work.”⁷ We should be praying for their courage in the face of persecution & death!

⁵ (Derek Kidner, *The Message of Jeremiah* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1987], 124).

⁶ (Walter Brueggemann, *Like Fire in the Bones: Listening for the Prophetic Word in Jeremiah* [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2006], 6).

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tVtkm5zEmD0&t=11s>

A year ago Beirut, Lebanon experienced an explosion which devastated the city. The lasting effects have been horrible. Massive unemployment, 500 car lines at stations lasting hours to get a couple liters of gas, 6-20 hours a day of blackouts, violence, increased corruption, threats & more. We work with one Christian Mission there which seeks to evangelize Lebanon, and the whole Middle East. They've been courageous, and in a very bad situation they've seen the Good News take root in almost 3000 conversions of Muslims in recent months! They've been active in every part of aftercare, some of which Six:Eight supports, and everything is to the end of sharing the salvation message of Jesus to those hurting. The hurt has opened the spiritual wound which was already there, and Jesus is their answer. Praise God there are faithful courageous Christians there to do the work even though they could cower, leave, or give in to exhaustion. Instead, they've taken Jeremiah's path - to see bad news as good, and to continue to proclaim His Word to the masses who need it! (Support Interns?)

We stand with Christians throughout history in believing to follow Jesus means upholding the Bible as the inspired Word of God in all situations, good & bad. And that God's called us to His mission, for His glory among all people groups. That alone poses serious & increasing problems in relationship with others in society today.

Many times Christians are the ones labeled as bearing bad news, as if our message makes people say, "Christians aren't seeking our good, but our ruin." A woman in the UK was arrested for street preaching on on **Feb. 12, 2020**, she won the legal case in which she was charged with hate speech, harassment, causing alarm & provoking distress. Later she said, "All I was doing was preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ & I was arrested for it. There are dangers...I've had urine thrown at me & have been threatened, but Christians are called to preach the gospel of salvation & hope in any situation, no matter how tough, so I'm not afraid. Despite this experience, I'm determined to keep preaching. Since the pandemic began, I've seen more & more Christians taking to the streets of London to preach." Her story's not unique.

A recent **article** quoted filmmaker Michael Moore, where he called the Taliban religious nuts, then stated America has the same in comparing Southern Baptists to the Taliban, he said, "We're following dictates of conservative Christians. It's wrong there & it's wrong here." Other media outlets are doing the same in comparing the Pro-Life movement with the policies of the Taliban, all the while people are being hung, shot & even skinned alive in Afghanistan for their Christian beliefs, or for working with the US Government. Jesus' is an exclusive message, which dictates we turn from sin, which He defines, not us. That's the message which gets us in trouble, although it's the best for everyone.

We know these comparisons are wrong & unfair, but we can't control the narrative, people will believe what they want. **Our job is simply to proclaim God's Truth in the midst of it. Most likely you won't get murdered, rather someone may simply not like you, and for some that's enough - our desire to be liked is stronger than our devotion to Jesus! But...I'll admit, the day has come where you may lose job, promotion, money, or even freedom for your Christian conviction.**

We can get negative labels for righteous & unrighteous reasons, but one of the hardest & most necessary reasons we may receive that label is when we're asking fellow Christians to face the consequences of sin. Jeremiah, as God's messenger, wants what God wants, the faith & growth of his people. What looks like weeding out sin, refining a community, and facing the consequences of (sometimes & in this case, generational & corporate) sin, can feel like seeking ruin. I've been blamed for being negative, judgmental & hurtful for simply preaching what is clearly on the pages of the Bible & I expect that to increase.

I recently watched a short **Youtube video** of Jordan Peterson concerning Hitler. His point was that maybe Hitler never expected to win the war, due to certain military choices he'd made. For instance, to win, you'd never exterminate the Jews, you'd enslave them as forced free labor for the war effort. His actions didn't make sense. He quoted Hume who said that if you can't figure out a persons motivation, then look at the outcome & infer motivation. If Hitler caused mayhem, then maybe his goal was to cause as much chaos as possible in the shortest amount of time. In short, he was purely evil.

We're in a spiritual battle. Satan doesn't expect to win the war, he's just pure evil & wants to create as much chaos as possible in the shortest amount of time. The kingdom of God has come, but not fully come, the Scriptures teach Jesus ushered in the Kingdom of God, but that the final full establishment of it is in the future. Right now, it's like WWII, when on D-Day, June 6, 1944 the Allies stormed the beach of Normandy, the move which won the war. The war continued beyond that, but D-Day had broken the back of Germany & its allies. From that time on especially, Hitler never expected to win, he just wanted to create as much devastation as possible until V-Day (Victory) was achieved by the US & her allies on Sept 2, 1945.

That's where we are now, God's won the war, Satan's just doing all the damage he can. But those of us who live in the in-between of the kingdom here now & the full establishment of it in the future, need to remember, God's victorious, but it will be a **hard bloody spiritual battle until V-Day** which will come when a remnant from every people group is represented before the throne of God! As Jesus said in Matthew 24:14, *"This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."*

Jeremiah's a reminder to us that faithful deliverance of God's Truth will result in difficulty inside & outside the church. As His people, we're called to proclaim His Glory through His Mission to all the people groups of the world! **Will we, like Jeremiah, standing knee deep in mud in our dark prison realize sometimes bad news is for God's healing & continue to preach up & out to whomever may hear? That's the question.**

It helps to remember Paul's words to the Philippians (1:12-13) when we find it's difficult for us as well...¹² *Now I want you to know, brothers & sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel.* ¹³ *As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard & to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ.*

You heard Ezekiel's similar call in the beginning of the service (2:3-8, 3:4-9), it also helps to remember another thing God said to him which speaks to our deep responsibility of proclaiming truth in the lives of those around us...*"Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the people of Israel; so hear the word I speak & give them warning from me. 18 When I say to a wicked person, 'You will surely die,' and you do not warn them or speak out to dissuade them from their evil ways in order to save their life, that wicked person will die for their sin, and I will hold you accountable for their blood. 19 But if you do warn the wicked person & they do not turn from their wickedness or from their evil ways, they will die for their sin; but you will have saved yourself.*