

May We Be Known as Ones Who Speak God's Word Faithfully!

²³ **"Am I only a God nearby,"
declares the LORD,**

"and not a God far away?"

²⁴ **Who can hide in secret places
so that I cannot see them?"**

declares the LORD.

"Do not I fill heaven and earth?"

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²⁵ **"I have heard what the prophets say who prophesy lies in my name. They say, 'I had a dream! I had a dream!'"** ²⁶ **How long will this continue in the hearts of these lying prophets, who prophesy the delusions of their own minds?** ²⁷ **They think the dreams they tell one another will make my people forget my name, just as their ancestors forgot my name through Baal worship.** ²⁸ **Let the prophet who has a dream recount the dream, but let the one who has my word speak it faithfully. For what has straw to do with grain?"** declares the LORD. ²⁹ **"Is not my word like fire,"** declares the LORD, **"and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?"**

Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister who led Britain during World War II, was well known for his one liners. During the height of the war, when things were going badly for Britain, someone asked him, "What are we fighting for?" In typical Churchill fashion, he answered back, "Stop fighting and you'll soon find out." God has given to his church his Word, the Bible. And he charges us like he does in our reading today, **let the one who has my word speak it faithfully.** Why? Well imagine what happens if we stop preaching God's Word faithfully. Remember what happened in the time between Creation and the flood. Over the years, fewer and fewer people spoke or listened to God's Word until only one man, Noah, was doing it, and he had two jobs. One, to preach God's Word and the other, to build an ark for the flood that is about to come.

Let's listen to the Lord's command in Jeremiah today. May we be known as ones who do faithfully speak his Word. We need to because of all the lies that are out there.

I. There are many lies out there.

When you call a pastor to this congregation, you are asking him to speak to you. How they say something may be important for keeping you awake on a Sunday morning. But what they say is much more important. There were many pastors, or prophets, in the days of Jeremiah. They must have been very popular. The government sanctioned them. Why not? They were propping up the government's corruption of exploiting the weak to benefit the powerful. The people seemed to love them, too. Where God's prophets were declaring that God is displeased and destruction is coming, they said it was a lie. There will be nothing but peace and prosperity in the years to come. There was one problem. They were not telling the people what God said. And God knew it.

²³ **"Am I only a God nearby,"** declares the LORD, **"and not a God far away?"** ²⁴ **Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them?"** declares the LORD. **"Do not I fill heaven and earth?"** declares the LORD. You walk into a room and everyone suddenly gets quiet. Why? Maybe they were talking about you. We are very bold to gossip when someone is not there. These prophets were very bold because they thought God is too far away to pay any attention. Yes, God is far away. He is also very near. He knew what these prophets were up to. And he was not happy.

²⁵ **"I have heard what the prophets say who prophesy lies in my name. They say, 'I had a dream! I had a dream!'"** ²⁶ **How long will this continue in the hearts of these lying prophets, who prophesy the delusions of their own minds?** ²⁷ **They think the dreams they tell one another will make my people forget my name, just as their ancestors forgot my name through Baal worship.** It was bad enough that they were teaching the people their opinions and ideas. What made it worse is they passed them off as if it was God's Word. "I had a dream," they claimed as if God spoke to them. He didn't. I am sure they were good preachers. Maybe they even believed their own message. But they were tempting God's people to forget God's name. And most did. No wonder God was going to destroy Jerusalem and start all over again. He told them that, but no one listened to God's true prophets.

Don't feel too sorry for the people. They were not innocent sheep led astray. They could have checked to see if these prophets were telling the truth or not. They had God's true prophets, but they didn't listen. Yes, God was still writing his Old Testament, but he was already two thirds done by then. They could have looked up what God's Word said and compared it with their message. But they were too lazy too.

Two thousand plus years later, things haven't changed at all. Countless preachers today, some of them very gifted, friendly, charismatic, are intent to share their own opinions and ideas. I have heard how one denomination (I am sure there are many) have said that what the congregation wants becomes the official teachings of the church. So it is humans, not God, who makes up doctrine. They preach good news of a world without the devil, without hell, without sin. You can easily recognize such preaching

today. It never is about God except as some senile old man way out there who isn't paying much attention. God is a bystander, you are in control. He doesn't mean what he says. Of course, the lies are getting bolder and bolder. They think God is too far away to notice. But he does.

That is why God offers this challenge to all the false prophets in the world. ²⁸ **Let the prophet who has a dream recount the dream, but let the one who has my word speak it faithfully. For what has straw to do with grain?" declares the LORD.** ²⁹ **"Is not my word like fire," declares the LORD, "and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?"** Let them talk and share their dreams, God says. But let the ones who has his Word speak it faithfully. How do we do that? Simple. He wrote it down for us. I am getting ready for catechism class which will begin in a week and a half. Like I do every year, I review and tweak my lessons. I wrote 27 of them and that is only for one year of a two year course. For the fun of it, I counted up how many passages I will use in my lessons. Take a guess how many they will read this year? 366, and that is just for one year. I also start off each lesson with a Bible story and discussion, and I assign a chapter of the Bible they are to read at home and as homework to answer some questions on it. Why? So I can easily say to them, "This is what the Lord teaches about Baptism ... Communion ... Jesus as true God and man ... the Trinity ... salvation ... sin and grace ... the devil and hell." We know what God says.

And his Word is like a hammer. Got a piece of concrete you need removed? A 16 pound sledge hammer will do the trick. Or a jack hammer will do better. All lies and dreams and manmade opinions will be smashed to bits by God's Word. Don't be surprised if they refuse to admit defeat. Many will not. In fact, they will double down and become militant about it. But God's Word exposes them.

And it will be like a fire. You heard Jesus talk about starting a fire in our gospel reading. He was lighting it by sharing what God was up to with himself. He described his progression to the cross where he will die for the sins of the world. This sets the world on fire. Suddenly the devil's hold on people is threatened. Suddenly this illusion sinful mankind lives under is demolished. There will be conflict, even in families, Jesus warned, with mother against daughter and father against son as they debate whether we are sinners or not and whether we need a Savior or not.

But God's Word doesn't not merely smash and burn. It feeds us. When you go to the store to buy bread, which one do you want? The loaf made of 100% pure wheat, or one made from 100% straw? Straw has many uses around the barn or home, and it makes up about 95% of the plant, but it has no real food value. It will fill your stomach, but there is so little nutrition in it that you would whittle away and get very sick and die if all you ate was straw. However, the tiny grain has all the nutrients you need to live. The world throws out Christ and offers straw. Let the one who has God's Word speak it faithfully and offer grain instead. The grain alone nourishes.

I am amazed at Jeremiah. He is nicknamed the weeping prophet because most of his sermons dealt with God's anger over the sins of the people. Actually, not the sins, but their refusal to repent of those sins. He did preach, as God said, about the destruction of Jerusalem. But when that happened, he changed his tone. He immediately turned to a message of comfort, how God will not abandon his people. He will restore them, bring them back, and restart them again as he would point them to the coming Messiah. He would speak of another covenant God will make, one of forgiveness and restoration.

Like a hammer God's Word will smash you. It pulverizes our hardened hearts and stubborn pride. It crushes us as it reminds us that we have committed enough sins in one day to keep us out of heaven. After crushing us with the law, God immediately comes to us with comfort. The gospel is the good news that a Savior is born unto us. He is Christ, the Lord. The Law is telling us the truth. We don't have a leg to stand on before God. But we have Jesus. And who can accuse us of sin? No one, for Jesus is at the Father's right hand interceding for us, reminding God that those are paid for already by him. And this gospel must be preached unconditionally and with no strings attached. God has forgiven all your sins for the sake of Jesus Christ, period. Done. That's it. There are no exceptions. No conditions. Only Jesus.

When folks ask about your church, tell them. Tell them about our school that is increasing, our fully staffed Sunday School. Invite them next week for grilled pork chops. But that is only the appetizers. May we be known as a church who does speak God's Word, all of it, faithfully. This means we will not be politically correct. We will expose sins. But we also have grain, plenty of it, in the form of the gospel and a Savior. Make sure they know that. Amen.