

August 19, 2012
Pentecost 12

"Hated for Christ"

JEREMIAH 11:18-23

Because the LORD revealed their plot to me, I knew it, for at that time he showed me what they were doing. ¹⁹ I had been like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter; I did not realize that they had plotted against me, saying, "Let us destroy the tree and its fruit; let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be remembered no more." ²⁰ But, O LORD Almighty, you who judge righteously and test the heart and mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you I have committed my cause. ²¹ "Therefore this is what the LORD says about the men of Anathoth who are seeking your life and saying, 'Do not prophesy in the name of the LORD or you will die by our hands'-- ²² therefore this is what the LORD Almighty says: 'I will punish them. Their young men will die by the sword, their sons and daughters by famine. ²³ Not even a remnant will be left to them, because I will bring disaster on the men of Anathoth in the year of their punishment.'"

Remember the worm song that little boys like to sing around the campfire:

Nobody likes me, everybody hates me, I think I'll go eat worms! Big fat juicy ones, Eensie weensy squeensy ones, See how they wiggle and squirm! The national Education Association reports that every day, 160,000 children skip school because they fear being attacked or intimidated by other students. It's tough to go to work if you have a boss that doesn't like you or if you work with people who say bad things about you behind your back. If you are an NFL Christian quarterback by the name of Tim Tebow, you have your loyal fans who love you and your critics who despise you for your Christian faith.

Our friend Jeremiah the prophet had lots of people who hated him. Even the people of his hometown of Anathoth planned ways they could put him to death. Why was he so unpopular with people? Jeremiah was faithful to the Lord. He listened to the messages the Lord gave him. In chapter fifteen he says, "When your words came, I ate them, and they were my joy and my heart's delight." When he relayed these messages to the people, he was met with hatred and scorn.

Dear Christian, the Lord has embedded his Word in your life. God's word has brought you to believe that Jesus Christ is your Lord and God. You believe with all your heart that you are saved entirely by what Christ has done, not by anything you do or say or think in your life. His Word leads you to confess your faith to other people in your family, your neighborhood and in this community. People will not always appreciate what you say and what you believe. Jesus told his disciples things will get bad for us in the last days. "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me." Part of bearing our cross for Jesus is being hated by those who don't believe just as the people hated Jeremiah.

The plot

Jeremiah never realized how much the people of his hometown hated him until the Lord revealed to him their plot to kill him. "Because the Lord revealed their plot to me, I knew it, for at that time he showed me what they were doing." Jeremiah knew what the people were going to do to him because the Lord revealed their plot.

I am holding in my hand this meter that goes from one to ten. Jeremiah knew people did not like him. Perhaps he would judge their hatred for him as a two or three. The Lord revealed that their level of hatred was much higher, at a level of ten.

Jeremiah describes himself as a gentle lamb led to the slaughter. "I had been like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter; I did not realize that they had plotted against me." You have heard the expression, "He is like a doe in the headlights." The deer that sees the headlights coming does not realize the bright lights are an oncoming car that will end its life.

You have people you know personally that really don't care much about what you believe. They would rather not have you say anything to them about Jesus. How much would they dislike you if you started boldly witnessing to them as Jeremiah did? Would it be a one or two on the anger meter or would it be a nine or ten? How easy it is to say, "I don't want to say anything that might upset them. I don't want them to be angry at me."

A mother once told me about the anger her daughter poured on her for speaking the truth to her in love. Her daughter had just moved in with her new boyfriend. In love the mother told her daughter that this was unacceptable to the Lord. The daughter jumped all over her mother and even quoted the Bible. "Mother, don't you know what Jesus said about judging others? Judge not and you shall not be judged." When you knock down the idols people make for themselves with the Word of God, you are not going to win friends and influence people.

The Lord actually told Jeremiah what the people of his hometown were saying about him. "Let us destroy the tree and its fruit, let us cut him off from the land of the living that his name be remembered no more." They wanted to cut down the life of Jeremiah the way you might chop down a tree. They did not like the fruit Jeremiah was producing in his life.

Dear Christian, you are a branch connected to Jesus the Vine. You are producing fruit in your life that comes from realizing how Jesus has rescued and spare you from the consequences of your sin. Some of that fruit is very pleasing to people who are not Christians such the fruits mentioned in Galatians: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control." In his book "The City of God" the church father Augustine presented the case to the Roman government hat Christians are a blessing for society because of the fruits in their lives that they produce out of love for Christ.

There is some fruit that you produce in your life that is not liked by people who do not believe as you believe. You believe it is a form of idolatry to trust in yourself and how you live as a way to earn God's favor and love. You confess with the Apostle Paul, "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by observing the law; rather through the law

we become conscious of sin.” You believe that God’s standard for eternal life is not doing the best you can, but loving the Lord with your whole heart soul and mine and loving your neighbor as yourself. You believe you have not met God’s standard of righteousness. You believe you are saved by an alien righteous, a righteous outside of yourself that is found in Christ. There is a huge difference between trusting in the Lord for your righteousness instead of trusting in yourself.

Let me illustrate what we are up against in our belief system with an example of a young man I have come to know in this community. He told me recently that he had a serious melanoma on his arm. He showed it to me and told me that he would have to have the doctors dig deeply into his arm to remove the melanoma. He is deaf and we communicate by writing on a pad of paper. How foolish it would be for me to say we have some band-aids in a first aid kit in our church. I will put a band-aid over it and it will be OK. People are born into this world believing the little band aids of good they do here and there will cover their sin and make them acceptable to God in this life and for all eternity. What happens when you tear up the little band-aids and tell people what they have believed in all their life is worthless? They will go into attack mode. Romans 8 says the sinful mind is hostile to God.

Jesus knew what it was like to have the people of his hometown turn on him. When he stood up in the synagogue in Nazareth and read words about the Messiah to his hometown people, all the people were willing to say, “Oh, isn’t it wonderful to hear Jesus read the Scriptures to us.” But when Jesus told them these words were speaking about him, they grabbed him and tried to throw him over a cliff. More than once people wanted to pick stones to kill Jesus because he dared to claim he was God. They told Pontius Pilate that they wanted to have him crucified because he claimed he was God. Walk the streets of a Muslim country and proclaim Jesus is God and see how long it will be before a mob attacks you. Tell the Jehovah Witness who knocks at your door that you believe Jesus is your Lord and God, and see how quickly they try to convince you that what you believe is all wrong. Jesus said that we are his witnesses and he will give us the power of the Holy Spirit to speak the truth about him, just as the Lord told Jeremiah, “Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you.”

The peace

Jeremiah found peace in being able to turn this plot against his life over to the Lord. Here is how Jeremiah prayed, “But, O Lord Almighty, you who judge righteously and test the heart and mind, let me see your vengeance on them, for to you I have committed my cause.” Jeremiah puts this whole problem into the hands of the Lord. He leaves it up to the Lord to deal with the people who were plotting to take his life.

There is a great peace in leaving vengeance into the hands of the Lord. Romans 12 says: “Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay.’” When we see Mormon missionaries riding bicycles in our neighborhood, we certainly do not pray that harm would come to them. But we do pray that the Lord would hear our prayers to stop their missionary work and protect people from their false teaching. We pray as Jeremiah prayed.

The Lord always knows the best way to deal with people who are threatening Christians and hating them. The Lord told Jeremiah what he would do with the people in his hometown who were threatening them. "I will punish them. Their young men will die by the sword, their sons and daughters by famine. Not even a remnant will be left to them, because I will bring disaster on the men of Anathoth in the year of their punishment." The Lord God sent Jeremiah to call the people to come back to him, but they wanted nothing to do with his message. Eventually the Babylonians came into the land and destroyed Jerusalem, and the temple and the some of the surrounding villages such as Anathoth.

Jesus showed us how to deal with those who may hate us for what we believe. They heaped abuse and ridicule upon Jesus. They put a crown of thorns on his head and mocked his claims to be our King. They beat him severely and placed the cross on his shoulders. They crucified him with a criminal on his right and criminal on his left. As they were nailing him to the cross Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Jesus gives us the strength to pray for those who may hate us for what we believe. Jesus gives us the strength to witness to them. He gives us the strength to love them just he loved us. Amen.