

**Grace, mercy and peace are yours in abundance through faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.**

**38** Shephatiah son of Mattan, Gedaliah son of Pashhur, Jehucal son of Shelemiah, and Pashhur son of Malkijah heard what Jeremiah was telling all the people when he said, <sup>2</sup>“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. He will escape with his life; he will live.’” <sup>3</sup> And this is what the LORD says: ‘This city will certainly be handed over to the army of the king of Babylon, who will capture it.’”

<sup>4</sup> Then 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.”

<sup>5</sup> “He is in your hands,” King Zedekiah answered. “The king can do nothing to oppose you.”

<sup>6</sup> So they took Jeremiah and 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.

<sup>7</sup> But Ebed-Melech, a Cushite, an official in the royal palace, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern. While the king was sitting in the Benjamin Gate, <sup>8</sup> Ebed-Melech went out of the palace and said to him, <sup>9</sup>“My lord the king, these men have acted wickedly in all they have done to Jeremiah the prophet. They have thrown him into a cistern, where he will starve to death when there is no longer any bread in the city.”

<sup>10</sup> Then the king commanded Ebed-Melech the Cushite, “Take thirty men from here with you and lift Jeremiah the prophet out of the cistern before he dies.”

<sup>11</sup> So Ebed-Melech took the men with him and went to a room under the treasury in the palace. He took some old rags and worn-out clothes from there and let them down with ropes to Jeremiah in the cistern. <sup>12</sup> Ebed-Melech the Cushite said to Jeremiah, “Put these old rags and worn-out clothes under your arms to pad the ropes.” Jeremiah did so, <sup>13</sup> and they pulled him up with the ropes and lifted him out of the cistern. And Jeremiah remained in the courtyard of the guard. **This is God’s Word.**

**Dear People of God,**

I want you to be my messenger to the people. But Lord, I am not a good speaker. Don’t worry, says the Lord, I will tell you what to say. And don’t worry, these are my people but they have turned away from me so they will not like the message I want you to proclaim to them. Matter of fact, your ministry will be a difficult one so I don’t want you to marry or have children. But don’t worry, I will be with you and I will rescue you. How would you like to get a call like that? That was Jeremiah’s call into the public ministry as God’s prophet. His job was to call God’s people to repentance and to encourage them to change their ways or to face God’s wrath.

Even though Jeremiah had a harsh message, he loved the people. Matter of fact he is known as the “weeping prophet” because he didn’t have enough tears to match the sadness he felt as the

people kept taking a path away from God. At times Jeremiah was frustrated with the way God's people were living and he wanted to leave them to their sinful ways but God had called him to reach out to these people and so leaving was not an option.

As we consider the portion of scripture before us and the other two lessons read earlier they weren't too uplifting because they were all about persecution and carrying a cross as a Christian. But you might be wondering, **“What should I expect?”** As a Christian, **“What should I expect from the world in which I live”** and As a Christian, **“What should I expect from a God who loves me?”**

**I.** The city of Jerusalem was under siege – it was surrounded by the Babylonian Army and they were waiting for the people to run out of food and water and then surrender. God's plan was that the Babylonians would take the children of Israel into captivity and that would be their call to repentance . So Jeremiah's message was that the people should surrender and live. If they held out and then tried to fight through the Babylonians they would die. It seemed like a message of despair but this was God's plan for his people – a plan to prosper them and bring them back into the family of God's faithful people.

The men who came to King Zedekiah were some of the elders of the city who wanted to silence Jeremiah. They wanted the king to put Jeremiah to death but the king was weak and his reply was to let them do with Jeremiah whatever they decided. Jeremiah was a prophet and everyone knew it so if the men grabbed him and killed him there might be an uproar from the people. Instead these men grabbed Jeremiah and threw him into an empty cistern figuring that he would starve to death or die from exposure to the conditions in the cistern.

The cistern was a hole in the ground used to collect rainwater and even though it was empty, there was probably some pretty deep mud in the bottom along with bugs and maybe a rat or two.

As we think about Jeremiah and this harsh treatment we are reminded that even today there are some Christians who face the same kind of treatment that Jeremiah did. The Muslim world is not friendly to Christians and will burn their houses and even kill them if they can get away with it. That kind of persecution and suffering for the gospel is the kind of cross Jesus was talking about in the gospel lesson.

Fortunately, we don't have that kind of persecution in Winona. We don't have to worry about our church or our homes being vandalized or destroyed because we are Christians. We have a

freedom to proclaim the gospel message without fear of retribution. Sure, there will be people that don't want to hear it and they might even make fun of us or reject what we are saying but our cross is pretty light compared to the one that Jeremiah and other Christians in the world have to bear.

Last Sunday night Dawn and I went to a presentation by a Dr. from Pakistan. For a number of years he has been handing out Christian literature and sharing Jesus with thousands, even though Pakistan is a Muslim country. Recently he had to flee his country because of death threats but that hasn't stopped him from sharing the gospel. He and his wife are now headed for New York City to reach out with God's Word to the many diverse ethnic groups in that city.

This man and his wife feel that there are many people there that they can reach with the gospel. He understands the need to share the gospel and wants to inspire all of us to look for opportunities to reach out. He won't let anything stop him from sharing the love of Christ and neither should we, because even though the world isn't always so welcoming to our message, it is a life-saving message that everyone needs to hear.

**II.** As Jeremiah was thrown into that cistern, I wonder what he was thinking. God had warned him that his ministry would be difficult but God has also promised to rescue him. Was that going to happen or was this the end of his life on this earth? Was his rescue going to be death and then everlasting joy in heaven because of his faith in God?

Jeremiah didn't have to wait too long before God rescued him. It came from a Gentile named Ebed-Melech who had heard about this injustice. Ebed-Melech went to the king and asked for permission to rescue Jeremiah. The king assented and Ebed-Melech led the rescue of Jeremiah – carefully lifting him out of the cistern so that he could return to proclaiming God's message to the people.

This whole situation reminds us of God's promise to rescue us as well. The people couldn't understand how surrendering to the Babylonians and being taken into exile could be a good thing but it was what they needed at the time for their spiritual life. Jeremiah probably was not happy about his predicament in the cistern either but he had God's promise to rescue him – however that rescue might come.

We don't always like what God's Word says to us or the situations that come into our lives. They can be downright depressing and difficult. But God knows what we need for our spiritual

lives and sometimes we need these challenges to pull us closer to God or to help us refocus our lives on our Savior and we have God's promises. After all, he did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all and if God did that, he will help us through the other difficulties we have in this life.

So look to the good news of salvation – Jesus Christ has paid for your sins and they are forgiven. That is the good news we get to hear and trust, and it is the good news that refreshes us every week. We have God's promise that he will never leave us or forsake us. That is the good news of scripture that God is walking with us through life – giving us strength and even carrying us at times as we get weak and weary. We have God's promise that he will work everything out for our good according to his purpose. That is what he did for Jeremiah and so many Christians that have gone before us and that is what he will do for us.

So we can handle whatever comes into our lives because God is for us and he loves us and he helps us. Treasure that good news and share it with others remembering that our cross is light and easy to carry because God is at our side and walking with us every day. Amen.