



Fighting Temptation 2) When You Feel Like Giving Up

Picture a time when you felt like giving up on something. Maybe it was a struggle to hold to a diet, carry out a job, or finish a project. Did you end up tossing in the towel and giving up? Would you if everyone else hated you for it and was telling you to give it up and threatening to hurt you if you didn't? Today we consider one of the biggest struggles we all face. It's the fight against sin. We fight against it in our own life and we speak out against it. For one of God's prophets, Jeremiah, this struggle was especially hard. God called him to speak out against the people's sins. Jeremiah had so many reasons to just give up. He made so little headway. Yet he never gave up. We continue with our series for Lent on fighting temptation. What do you do **when you feel like giving up the fight against sin?** This morning we'll consider why Jeremiah didn't give in to the temptation to quit. His struggle is useful for our learning when we are tempted to toss in the towel in the fight against sin.

Out of all the prophets in the Old Testament I **envy Jeremiah's work the least**. When he was young God called him to speak out against the idolatry and sin of the people. This was a challenging call because a spiritual poison had spread over all of Judah. All over the land the people were worshipping idols. They baked food and offered it to the so-called Queen of heaven and other false gods. They openly worshipped these false gods. They turned to sexual sins and other godless acts. Some of them were even following the horrible practice of offering up their sons and daughters to false gods in the fire.

These sins had spread everywhere. At one point God challenged to Jeremiah to find even one single godly person. (Jeremiah 5:1-5) *"Go up and down the streets of Jerusalem, look around and consider, search through her squares. If you can find but one person who deals honestly and seeks the truth, I will forgive this city."* And it wasn't just the people working the fields and businesses. The prophets had all turned bad too. For every time Jeremiah spoke out against the people's idolatry and sin, a dozen false prophets would say, "there's no sin in that." There were so many false prophets that Jeremiah was nearly alone. And as if that wasn't bad enough the priests had all turned away from the truth. They ought to have known better! Jeremiah had at one point mistakenly reasoned, "These people don't listen because they are only the poor and uninstructed. They don't know God's Word. I will go to the leaders and speak to them. They'll know better!" But when he did approach the leaders, he found out that they too were all dead set against the Lord! The spiritual poison was all pervasive. That made it easier for everyone to tolerate. It even poured into the very heart of the city of Jerusalem and the royal palace. Everyone was against Jeremiah's preaching. The people, the prophets, the priests, and the princes were all poisoned by sin.

And **what happened when Jeremiah rebuked them?** They persisted! (Jeremiah 5:3-4) *"...LORD... You struck them, but they felt no pain; you crushed them, but they refused correction. They made their faces harder than stone and refused to repent."* And this went on as they persisted in unrepentant sin for years! When we get to our reading in chapter 26 we find that Jeremiah has preached to the people, the prophets, the priests, and the princes for over twenty-three years. But all this time they persisted in resisting his preaching. "Don't listen to him," they told each other.

When **it seemed like it could hardly get any worse for Jeremiah, they did.** The people, prophets, and priest began to plot against him. And this was no ordinary persecution. They wanted him dead. *"The priests, the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speak these words in the house of the Lord. 8 But as soon as Jeremiah finished telling all the people everything the Lord had commanded him to say, the priests, the prophets and all the people seized him and said, "You must die!"*

You and I might read about Jeremiah and say, "I'm glad I didn't have to live in a time like his." But if we think that we have it easier, we have already begun to give up the fight. Sure, there may not be a lot of people openly setting up idols to worship. But what is worshipped? Is God worshipped above all things when hearts chase after so many other things above him? Secret idolatry abounds as God takes second place to people, politics, and purse padding. Many leave God behind. We call it secret idolatry because it isn't always so obvious as idolatry. But it is idolatry. Sometimes the poison of secret idolatry is so pervasive that we don't even notice it. Are you tempted to just reason like so many in Jeremiah's day: "I don't see any problem." And sure, there may not be anyone offering up their sons and daughters in the fire to a false god. But are we content to tolerate the fact that most appear comfortable with that an estimated 3000 children in our nation are killed by abortion each day? That's nearly 20% of all our children offered up to the false god of self. Many people and rulers are making that sin even more tolerated and open. Many churches not only tolerate but support this practice. What about the sexual sins in society that creep into your life and your family's life? We're tempted to reason, "It's all over and everyone does it, it can't be that bad." The spiritual poison is all pervasive. That makes it easier for everyone to tolerate.

So, what about you? Does the pervasive nature of the sin cause you and I to just let it slide? Does the fact that everyone is doing it make it easier to just not fight against your own sin or speak up against the sin of others? We are tempted to just assume that speaking up isn't going to amount to anything. So do we speak, or do we give up? "I'm glad I don't have to live in a time like Jeremiah" we might say. But might we only say that because our time is more like Jeremiah's than we like to admit? Might we only say that because the sins are so prevalent, and we don't want to admit the times we've failed to fight against it?

And speaking up against sins which are very common can cause you trouble! I don't think you'd have to try too hard today to join Jeremiah in saying, "the word of the LORD has brought me insult and reproach all day long."

Isn't it tempting to just give up? If we can just avoid saying anything about sin to anyone then we'd all get along fine, right? If we could just hold our tongue and hide God's Word, then we wouldn't have to deal with rejection, ridicule, and retaliation. But to give up the fight against sin is to give up the only fight that matters in the end. To remain silent instead of speaking up is to join in the crowds of people, false prophets, and lying priests. It is to deny the Lord and his Word. What ought he to do when we give up on his Word by siding with the majority instead of with the maker and master of us all?

We see what God does when the world gives up on him and his Word. He sends someone to share it still more. Jeremiah spoke the word of the Lord to the people right up to the very last day before Jerusalem was destroyed. God never gave up. Why was Jeremiah speaking up if they didn't want to hear it and wanted him dead? His answer is revealing. "The Lord sent me..." He wasn't there to carry out his own personal agenda. He didn't pick the particular sins that bothered him. He only spoke what the Lord sent him to speak. It can be easy to only speak the words that we are interested in speaking and withhold speaking the words that we feel might cause friction or trouble. But God sends us to say, "The Lord sent me to speak." When someone hears a Christian speak, they need to know it is spoken as a divine message for a divine purpose.

Jeremiah **persisted in speaking against evil because he knew God's purpose in sending him.** "That they may change their ways and the Lord may relent from sending disaster." This had always been Jeremiah's goal. He was sent by the Lord, "To tear down and to build up." He was there to speak against sin so that he could also point to the hope that comes from a merciful God who pardons every sinner that turns to him. God sent all his prophets to speak of judgment and hope.

In grace God sent more than Jeremiah and the prophets. He sent his Son. Many of the people, the priests, and the rulers rejected him when he preached. Their false worship of self and refusal to see their sin led them to plot against him. He was told, "leave this place because Herod wants to kill you." **Jesus, of all people, should have felt like giving up.** We read earlier his lament over the constant rejection he faced. "*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you...*" He saw every rejection by everyone of his covenant people for thousands of years. And now the rulers, priests, and people in Jerusalem wanted him dead.

But Jesus was undeterred. Even though he knew Jerusalem would reject him like it rejected all faithful preachers before him, he still came. Our God is so patient and so gracious that he never felt like giving up -even when the world continued in stubborn refusal to listen to his Word. And even as they brought Jesus before the rulers and demanded that he die, he still did not give up. He carried out the work he was sent to do: suffer and die in our place. God should have given up on this world. But he didn't. He didn't toss in the towel even after it rejected him over and over. He did this because of **his gracious, loving concern for a dying world.** Jesus said of Jerusalem and along with it all the world for that matter "How often I have longed to gather you together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings."

That meant not giving up even when it cost him everything. In order that you and I might not perish with a world poisoned by sin and doomed to hell, Jesus came. Like Jeremiah he came to tear down and build up. He had his flesh torn and body killed in order to take our place. He did this so that those who trust in him might be built up into God's house as forgiven and restored. He came to protect his rebellious creation that didn't even want him. That is love! That is what our God has done for us. And he's done it for every false prophet, priest, prince and person in this world! That is an uncommon love which only God could bring to a world of sinners!

That message is what he wants proclaimed and shared. He graciously sent prophet after prophet. He graciously sent evangelist after evangelist. The living Jesus still sends faithful preachers to share his Word with the world today. He sends them with his Word of judgment and hope, of warning and pardon. That's what God was doing through Jeremiah. That's what he is still doing for you and me and all this world. He is still in love longing to gather us to be with him.

Our Lord wants us to persevere in speaking his Word. And that task is never easy because his Word calls the situation for what it is. It goes against the prevalent flow of this world and it shows us the poison that flows out of our hearts. We are guilty of idolatry, immorality, and selfishness. We are guilty of turning our backs on our God. We are guilty of persisting in sin even when his Word rebukes us. But his Word calls the situation for what it is: we are completely forgiven for all our sins through Jesus who took our place. Our God is so merciful that our situation is now unbelievably wonderful!

It turns out Jeremiah wasn't all alone. There were some other prophets who spoke up. They died for doing so. But there was one man who did speak up with Jeremiah. Even though the king had other prophets like Jeremiah put to death for their words, this time someone intervened. We see that just one man, named Ahikam, supported Jeremiah. So, Jeremiah was not put to death yet. He lived for another twenty years to speak Words of warning and hope. God calls on you to speak his Word faithfully and to support those who are called to full-time ministry today. You are not alone. You are still alive today so that you can speak the truth of his Word and support that truth.

He calls on you to speak law and gospel, sin and grace. God never gave up on his plan to rescue us from our sins. Never give up the fight to share that Word -law and gospel- until God's Word and his love prevails.