

Standing Humbly • Jeremiah 26

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *The Early Church*

1. It is estimated that several million believers were martyred during the first centuries of the Church
2. What's amazing is the courage with which these early believers faced their arrest, beating and execution
3. Even their enemies, those tormenting them, gave the consistent testimony that Christians died nobly
 - a. they didn't curse and swear
 - b. no, they prayed for their persecutors
 - c. and in the moment of their death, they showed nothing but an *unconquerable faith*

B. *Ignatius*

1. Let me tell you the story of Ignatius
2. He was the bishop of Antioch in Syria; in fact, he is the one who took Peter's place after Peter had gone to Rome
3. During the reign of the emperor Trajan, a man who practiced a campaign of brutality against believers, Ignatius was arrested and sentenced to death
4. Being a well-known leader of the Christians, the Romans thought it best that he be made a public spectacle, so he was sent to Rome to die
5. This was the era of gladiatorial combats in the Coliseum
 - a. the Romans, wanting more blood, had taken to throwing criminals to wild animals and watching from the stands as they were torn apart by the beasts
 - b. this is where many Christians ended up – facing the lions in the Coliseum
6. As Ignatius was being led to Rome, he and his guards had to travel through Asia Minor
 - a. the whole way there, as they stopped in each city to rest,
 - b. Ignatius would take the opportunity to strengthen and confirm the churches
 - c. rather than accept the sympathy of the people, he used the time to exhort them and to preach the Word of God.
 - d. when he got to Smyrna, he learned that there was a movement in Rome among some notable citizens to get him pardoned
 - e. he wrote them a letter asking them not to plead for his release
7. In an age when many average believers were being martyred for their faith in Christ, he didn't want his status as a leader to exempt him from their fate.
8. It just didn't seem right to Ignatius that he would be let go when some young mother or single man would be put to death only because he hadn't made a name
9. Ignatius counted it a privilege to be a martyr
10. In his letter to the church at Rome he wrote, "Now I begin to be a disciple. I care for nothing, of visible or invisible things, so that I may but win Christ. Let

fire and the cross, let the companies of wild beasts, let breaking of bones and tearing of limbs, let the grinding of the whole body, and all the malice of the devil, come upon me; be it so, only may I win Christ Jesus!”

11. He arrived in Rome, was tried and found guilty of being a Christian.
12. As he was being led down the hallway that would exit onto the floor of the Coliseum, he could hear the roars of the hungry lions in their cages
13. The last words he was heard to say were, “I am the wheat of Christ: I am going to be ground with the teeth of wild beasts, that I may be found pure bread.”

C. Death Wish

1. Did Ignatius have a *death wish*? Did he *want* to die? Was he depressed and discouraged and so found the prospect of martyrdom something to look forward to? No!
2. Ignatius wanted to live – but he wanted to live for Christ
3. And he had determined that if the world would not let him live for Christ, then he would rather depart this world.
4. It’s the way Ignatius died, it’s the dignity and humility that marked his example we need to consider today.
5. It’s a dignity and humility that we see in the Prophet Jeremiah in chapter 26

D. For Later

1. I realize that on the surface, what we are looking at today may not seem too terrible *practical*
2. We don’t face imminent martyrdom for following Christ in our nation at this time
3. So it may seem that while what we’re looking at is *true*, it isn’t particularly *helpful*
4. By the time we’re finished, I think we will all see that what we find here is indeed practical – infinitely so!

II. TEXT

A. Set The Scene

1. Let’s set the scene . . .
2. This is at the midpoint of Jeremiah’s 40 year career as a prophet
3. From beginning to end, his message had been one thing:
 - a. the Babylonians are coming as God’s judgment on the nation of Judah
 - b. they will destroy the cities, ravage the countryside,
 - c. and most tragic of all, they will demolish Jerusalem and the temple
 - d. then, as a final indignity, they will deport the people out of the land and take them back to Babylon
4. For over 20 years Jeremiah has been preaching this same message
 - a. he had used different object lessons
 - b. he had preached in different places to different groups of people
 - c. but the response was the same everywhere he went

- d. no one wanted to hear it – and virtually no one responded
- 5. In chapter 26, God tells Jeremiah to go to the temple and proclaim his message there
 - a. though it is too late for the *nation* – it is not too late for *individuals*
 - b. while the Babylonians cannot be stopped, if *individuals* will turn from their worship of idols and turn back to God, then they will be spared the full effect of God’s wrath.
- 6. So Jeremiah does what the Lord told him to do: He went to the temple and warned the people of the coming judgment and how to lessen it’s severity in their own lives
- 7. But the people in the temple didn’t want to hear it!
- 8. They had had enough of Jeremiah’s negativity.
- 9. Let’s pick it up at verse 7 . . .

B. Vs. 7-9

- 7 **So the priests and the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of the LORD.**
- 8 **Now it happened, when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that the LORD had commanded *him* to speak to all the people, that the priests and the prophets and all the people seized him, saying, “You will surely die!**
- 9 **Why have you prophesied in the name of the LORD, saying, ‘This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate, without an inhabitant’?” And all the people were gathered against Jeremiah in the house of the LORD.**
- 1. Jeremiah had told them that when the Babylonians came, they would lay waste to the city
- 2. And that glorious temple, adorned as it was with tons of gold, silver and bronze, would be leveled.
- 3. This both shocked and outraged the people!
 - a. in their minds, to speak against the city which God had said would be His dwelling place was equal to *blasphemy*!
 - b. the idea that the temple, where His glory had been manifest, which they considered His house, would one day soon lie in ruins at the hands of godless pagans, made their blood boil, and they blamed Jeremiah for even suggesting such a thing
- 4. So as soon as he is finished speaking, they decide the best thing to do is show their outrage by laying hold of him and demanding he be put to death
- 5. Picture if you will, a ship at sea
 - a. the passengers are in the ballroom, drinking, dancing, eating and making merry
 - b. in comes a sailor who climbs up on the bandstand and clears his throat
 - c. once the crowd quiets, he says, “I have been looking over the side for the last hour and have noticed that the ship is taking on water – we’re sinking and will soon be swimming for our lives.”
 - d. what do the passengers do?
 - e. they yell at him to be quiet – some standing near him, pull him rudely off the platform and haul him to the door

- f. they are angry he has disturbed their party, their good times
 - g. and they decide that to keep him from bothering them again, they are going to throw him overboard
6. That is what is happening in Jeremiah 26.

C. Vs. 10-11

- 10 **When the princes of Judah heard these things, they came up from the king's house to the house of the LORD and sat down in the entry of the New Gate of the LORD'S house.**
- 11 **And the priests and the prophets spoke to the princes and all the people, saying, "This man deserves to die! For he has prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your ears."**
1. The tumult in the temple over Jeremiah reaches to the ears of the royal officials who come running
 2. When they arrive, they are quickly brought up to date by the religious leaders
 3. Jeremiah must be put to death for speaking out

D. Vs. 12-15

- 12 **Then Jeremiah spoke to all the princes and all the people, saying: "The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city with all the words that you have heard.**
- 13 **Now therefore, amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the LORD your God; then the LORD will relent concerning the doom that He has pronounced against you.**
- 14 **As for me, here I am, in your hand; do with me as seems good and proper to you.**
- 15 **But know for certain that if you put me to death, you will surely bring innocent blood on yourselves, on this city, and on its inhabitants; for truly the LORD has sent me to you to speak all these words in your hearing."**
1. You have to admire Jeremiah's courage and faithfulness
 2. The princes are the ones with the authority to execute him – he knows that
 3. But he will not soft-sell the message God has given him
 4. He repeats it, word for word – Repent or Perish!
 5. V. 14 is what I want to focus on this morning in the time left us
 6. Having given his message, Jeremiah humbly commits himself into their hands
 7. He takes a stand – but it's a stand marked, not by *haughtiness* or *defiance*; but by *humility*
 8. Look at v. 14 again . . .
- 14 **As for me, here I am, in your hand; do with me as seems good and proper to you.**
9. Jeremiah had an opportunity to save his neck if he wanted.
 - a. all he had to do was claim that they *misunderstood* him
 - b. or he could have backed away from his earlier statements –
 - c. actually, the people would have given him the room to do that

- d. better to let him deny his own words than to force them to execute him.
- 10. But Jeremiah humbly says – “I stand by every word I’ve spoken! It is all true and I retract nothing! REPENT OR DIE!”
- 11. Then he says, “Okay, I’ve delivered my message. You’ve arrested me. Do with me as you please.”
- 12. Notice what he didn’t do.
 - a. he didn’t rail at them and call them idiots.
 - b. he didn’t go into a tantrum and boo hoo!
 - c. he quietly and humbly submitted to them.
- 13. Why? Because they were the *civil authority*.
 - a. they were dead wrong in their opposition to him, but they were still the duly constituted civil government,
 - b. and it is required of God’s people that they submit to those in authority over them.
- 14. Now, here’s the rub – these officials were violating their authority by arresting Jeremiah because he had done nothing wrong – but Jeremiah *still submitted* to them in spirit.
- 15. It wasn’t up to him to hold them accountable for their *use* of power – God would hold them accountable –
- 16. But Jeremiah knew he would *also* have to answer to God for what kind of an *attitude* he took toward them.

E. Authority and Submission

1. The whole issue of *authority and submission* is one of the Bible’s most prominent themes
2. The reason for this is because it defines the relationship between God and His creation
 - a. He is Creator and Sovereign over all - the creation is in submission to Him
 - b. but the Fall of Lucifer and the Fall of Man has resulted in a fundamental twisting and distortion of the Creation order
3. God’s whole plan of redemption is concerned with returning the creation to it’s original and right relationship with Him.
4. So he builds in to the creation different kinds of relationships, all concerned with this principle of *authority and submission*
5. In Ephesians 5 & 6, Paul speaks about the structure of authority & submission that God has established for the home
6. In 1 Corinthians 11 he speaks about the same thing and goes so far as to say that as the followers of Christ, we ought to be so diligent in our practicing of submission that it is manifest even in the style if our clothing and the way we carry ourselves
 - a. that’s what it means in v. 10 when he writes . . .
 - b. **For this reason the woman ought to have a *symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.***
 - c. in this passage, Paul is dealing with the roles of men and women in the church
 - d. in Corinth at that time, women wore a covering over their heads as a way of

- showing that they were either married or still living in the home of their fathers
- c. the head covering spoke of their being covered by the authority of a man to whom they were showing submission
 - d. the only women who did *not* wear head coverings were women on the prowl – specifically, temple prostitutes
 - e. problems arose when some of the women of the church at Corinth decided that since Christ had made men and women *equals* in the kingdom of God, that equality meant they were no longer called to be in submission to their husbands and fathers - so they had removed their head coverings
 - f. Paul wrote to show them that while men and women are indeed equal before God, equality does not dispense with the roles we play and the rules regarding our relationships
 - g. Paul tells the ladies to wear the symbol of being under authority – WHY?
 - h. because of the angels! That’s one of those phrases you occasionally encounter in scripture that makes you stop and go –“WHAT?!?!?”
 - i. the point is this: Ever since the Fall, when all of creation was thrown into upheaval because of the rebellion of man and the devil, the whole issue of submission and authority has been debated in the heavenly realm
 - j. as the company of the redeemed, you and I have the opportunity to side with God in the debate by our active and ready submission
 - k. as we submit to those in authority over us, who ever they may be, the angelic hosts look on and see a living demonstration of creatures with free will, who use that power of choice to take the place assigned to us and be content with it
6. In this massive heavenly debate, whenever a teenager humbly and cheerfully submits to his or her parents, the angels of God rejoice while the demons grimace
 7. Whenever a wife readily defers to her husband, the angels chalk up another one for the Kingdom of God while the hosts of hell rage
 8. Whenever a man feels the pull of the world to go out drinking with the guys from work, but submits to the voice of the Spirit and instead goes home to love his wife and kids, the angels get all excited because they see another example to the way it’s supposed to be!
 9. Friends, at work in the relationship between employees and supervisors; at school, in the relationship between students and teachers – there is a whole lot more going on there than merely taking a class or doing a job
 10. There is a whole web of relationships governed by the principle of authority and submission
 11. It is a cosmic, age-old debate between the Kingdom of God and the rebellious kingdom of Satan
 12. And the angels are watching and learning!

E. Romans 13

1. There is another level of authority and submission that Paul defines for the life of God’s people in Romans 13

2. There he writes in v. 1 . . .
 - 1 **Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.**
 - 2 **Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.**
3. The home and work and school aren't the only places God has established the principle of authority and submission
4. People owe submission to the governing authorities because in His grace God has ordained these authorities to keep the peace
5. Does that mean that the governing authorities are always right?
 - a. no, far from it.
 - b. there are times when those in authority misuse their power
 - c. and while they will have to give account to God of how they have used their position and the authority given them,
 - d. the duty of the believer is to *submit* to them
6. What's the believer to do when submission to the governing authorities means disobedience toward the Lord?
 - a. the answer to that is found right here in Jeremiah 26
 - b. look at what Jeremiah did
 - c. after faithfully proclaiming the message God gave him, he said
 - 14 **As for me, here I am, in your hand; do with me as seems good and proper to you.**
 - d. they didn't want him to speak, but he had to because God had told him to
 - e. then he humbly submitted to them and their use of authority to arrest and try him.
 - f. if they decided to execute him, it would certainly be unjust and wrong as he tells them in v. 15
 - g. but he would not stand there and defiantly read them the riot act
 - h. he wouldn't rail at them and call them names
 - i. he didn't threaten to take them court
 - j. he quietly committed himself into their hands, knowing that as he submitted to them, he was really submitting himself to the Lord.
7. Jesus did this as He stood before the Sanhedrin and Pilate
 - a. if there was ever a miscarriage of justice, it was the trial of Christ
 - b. but He still quietly and humbly deferred to their place as the governing authorities
 - c. before Pilate, Jesus even acknowledge the reality of what Paul wrote in Romans 13
 - 1) in his frustration, Pilate asked if Jesus didn't know that he had the power to set Him free or have Him executed.
 - 2) Jesus replied by saying that Pilate only had power because His Father had given it to him.
8. When Peter and John stood before the Sanhedrin some time later in the book of Acts
 - a. the officials told them to stop preaching in the name of Jesus

- b. Peter quietly and humbly informed them that they would be unable to comply with their command
 - c. Jesus had told them to preach – so preach they would
 - d. if the Sanhedrin felt compelled to re-arrest them, so be it, they would not resist
9. The history of the Church is a long one of just this sort of humble submission on the part of millions of martyrs and the persecuted.
- a. when they were arrested and condemned to death, they didn't defy the authorities and call them vicious names.
 - b. they stood their ground, but they stood humbly

III. CONCLUSION

A. Not Here, But There

1. It is unlikely that you or I will have to stand in the same place Jeremiah or Ignatius stood
2. While Christianity is being pushed to the fringes of our society, we're still a way off from official persecution at the hands of the state
3. So it may seem that this message, while true, isn't terribly practical
4. If we were living in Sudan or Viet Nam it would be
 - a. at this moment in the Sudan, there are jails holding dozens of our brothers and sisters who are awaiting trial
 - b. they will soon stand before a Muslim judge who will condemn them to death
 - c. simply because they will not renounce Christ and embrace Islam
5. We ought to pray for them, that they will be able to stand humbly before their tormentors and give evidence of the surpassing love and power of Christ.

B. The Candle

1. There is a story about a young Christian who lived during a time of persecution
2. Several of his friends and family had already been burned at the stake
3. He knew it was just a matter of time before they came for him as well but he didn't know if he would have the strength to endure the trial
4. So he took a candle and lit it.
 - a. he thought he would stick his finger in it to see if he could endure the pain
 - b. the moment the flame touched and burned him, he yanked it away,
 - c. the pain was too much and he was torn by the grief that when the real moment came he would disgrace the Lord
5. But when his moment came, and he stood amidst the firewood, he gave a noble witness for Jesus Christ
6. God gave him the power when he needed it.

c. Here & Now

1. When I read the stories of the martyrs, I ask myself, "Would I be able to endure?"
2. I know many of you ask the same question

3. Well you know what – we don't have to light a candle and stick our finger in it to know
4. You see, God has lit hundreds of candles around us every day
 - a. we find them in our homes in the relationships of the family
 - b. we find them in our schools with our teachers and faculty members
 - c. we find them in our jobs with our boss
 - d. we find them driving down the road in the form of a red light or stop sign
5. Authority & submission – in many ways, this one issue defines our lives.
6. So let me end with that – How goes this in your life?
7. Are you a submitted person – submitted in those relationships God clearly lays out in His word?
 - a. is your submission prompt?
 - b. is it willing?
 - c. is it cheerful?
 - d. is it humble, not calling attention to itself?
8. Remember, there is a cosmic debate going on, and the angels are watching!