

3. Unpopular message and messenger

January 22, 2015

Here is a question that was asked by a student who attended at UVA's Darden School of Business in Charlottesville, VA. I found it from the Wall Street Journal, June 14, 2010.

Question: What advice do you have for delivering an unpopular message to your employees, particularly when you may not have bought into the message yourself?

Answer: "It's hard enough to deliver unpopular news to your employees, but it's even harder when you struggle with the message yourself. If you're in a position with your superiors to push back on the decision, you might want to try that first," recommends Gary Schuman, president of CDL Consulting, a leadership and change management consulting firm in Baltimore. "If you lose that battle, then as a leader you have to figure out a way to get on board with the message," he says.

That just about describes the Jeremiah's situation with the Lord who gave him the message that would be extremely unpopular to the people of Israel who didn't like him because he always brought unfavorable messages from the Lord to them. The human mentality has not been changed. They, including us, like to hear what pleases our ears, not necessarily good for our future.

You probably remember what happened after a godly king Josiah of Judah died. Josiah's son Jehoahaz reigned for three months, but was deposed by the king of Egypt and replaced by his brother Eliakim, whom the Egyptian king named "Jehoiakim." Because of Josiah's defeat, Judah was now under Egypt's full control. During Jehoiakim's eleven years' reign, he led the nation back into their old idolatrous ways. Although Josiah had removed the idols from the land, he couldn't take idol worship out of the hearts of the people.

The Israelis thought that they would not be punished for their idolatry, because they had the temple in Jerusalem and they, after all, were the chosen people of God. "No evil could ever come to us," so did they think. But that was not what the Lord had in mind. He gave a message to Jeremiah so that he could proclaim it from the temple. In this courageous message, the prophet diagnosed the nation in four ways:

- 1) **False worship** – chapter 7
- 2) **False prophets** – chapter 8
- 3) **False confidence** – chapter 9
- 4) **False gods** – chapter 10

It was not a popular and favorite message of the Israelis. Jeremiah almost got himself killed.

A. FALSE WORSHIP

Jeremiah 7:4 Do not trust in these lying words, saying, 'The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these.'

Jeremiah 7:11-15 Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of thieves in your eyes? Behold, I, even I, have seen it," says the Lord. 12 "But go now to My place which was in Shiloh, where I set My name at the first, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of My people Israel. 13 And now, because you have done all these works," says the Lord, "and I spoke to you, rising up early and speaking, but you did not hear, and I called you, but

you did not answer, 14 therefore I will do to the house which is called by My name, in which you trust, and to this place which I gave to you and your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh. 15 And I will cast you out of My sight, as I have cast out all your brethren--the whole posterity of Ephraim.

Religion is an awful thing in my opinion. As you heard me saying this previously, it sends more people to hell with a false sense of security than any other thing. One of the false sense of securities was having the Solomon's temple within the four walls of Jerusalem.

The temple of Jerusalem that was the nuclear symbol of the ancient Judaism became the visual and emotional false anchor point of their religion to the Israelis who ignored Jeremiah's messages that came from the Lord. In the beginning they assumed that there were no differences between Jehovah God and the idols. But as time passed, I doubted that they cared anything what the Lord said.

Exodus 20:25 And if you make Me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stone; for if you use your tool on it, you have profaned it.

People with their own religion, whatever kind that is, come up with their own way to worship their things. The Lord made it clear from the beginning that no human's way, but only His way in worshiping Him.

John 4:23 But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.

In our church we do not have an idol that is visible. But people still can have idols in their hearts – religion. Coming to church to appease one's heart is a religion, not a relationship with the Lord. Our Lord does not desire the rituals and formality, rather a genuine relationship and love for Him.

Jesus used v11 after He cleansed the temple in Matthew 21. A "den of thieves" is the place where lying and cheating criminals go to hide after they've committed their crimes.

These Israelis conveniently forgot what happened at Shiloh where the tabernacle used to be according to 1 Samuel 4. The evil sons of high priest Eli took the Ark of the Covenant to the battlefield like a good luck charm against the Philistines. But they lost the battle and it ended up in the hands of the enemy. When that happened, the Lord departed from the tabernacle.

Although the Jews knew this, they continued in their sins and rejected God's warning. Listen, self-deception is like a self-hypnosis. If a person lies so much and so often, that person starts to believe in one's lies and lives in one's lies as the truth.

B. FALSE PROPHETS

Jeremiah 8:8-12 "How can you say, 'We are wise, And the law of the Lord is with us'? Look, the false pen of the scribe certainly works falsehood. 9 The wise men are ashamed, They are dismayed and taken. Behold, they have rejected the word of the Lord; So what wisdom do they have? 10 Therefore I will give their wives to others, And their fields to those who will inherit them; Because from the least even to the greatest Everyone is given to covetousness; From the prophet even to the priest Everyone deals falsely. 11 For they have healed the hurt of the daughter of My people slightly, Saying, 'Peace, peace!'

When there is no peace. 12 Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed, Nor did they know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; In the time of their punishment They shall be cast down," says the Lord.

Just as these Israelis boasted that they had the temple, so they boasted that they had the Law of God. But it stopped there. Possessing the Bible is not the same as practicing what the Bible says. If that is the case, each Bible publishing company should be the most holy place on earth.

Just as there were false teachers and prophets in the temple who claimed to speak the truth of God were deceiving the ancient people of Judah who were glad to hear their phony messages, there are many false Bible teachers who claim to speak the truth of God are deceiving the 21st century people who are glad to hear their phony messages.

The teachers of the Emergent Church movement, the Seeker Sensitive churches, and the Word of Faith movement are the ones who tickle the itching ears of the people who want to appease their own desires as it is mentioned in 2 Timothy 4. Because they are pleased with their own teachings and meet the followers' demands, they are not ashamed of their false teachings. To them, God is nothing more than a means of gain. But the problem is that people do not stay away from them, rather they run to them as moths draw to flames.

C. FALSE CONFIDENCE

Jeremiah 9:23-26 Thus says the Lord: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches; 24 But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight," says the Lord. 25 "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "that I will punish all who are circumcised with the uncircumcised-- 26 Egypt, Judah, Edom, the people of Ammon, Moab, and all who are in the farthest corners, who dwell in the wilderness. For all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart."

If Jeremiah was living in the 21st century, he would add 'fame' in v23 as well. No matter how wise, how powerful, how wealthy, and how famous a person is, all those things will go away and others will forget that person. But knowing the Lord in person will last forever for that individual because he or she will be with the Lord in heaven eternally.

Jeremiah's heart was broken before the Lord for these people who were determined to the path of self-destruction. When we declare the unpopular message from the Lord to the people who don't care to listen to the Lord, we should do it out of compassion and love for them, not out of condemnation and elitism which we can fall into easily.

There is a striking contrast between the three fading glories of men in v23 and the three unfading ones of God in v24: the lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness.

In my opinion, there were three things that the ancient Jews boasted: the Law of God, the temple, and the covenant sign of circumcision. They rested their confidence in these physical things. But in reality, they completely missed the main points of these physical signs – worshipping the Lord their God, loving Him, and obeying Him.

God's covenant with the Jews included both blessings and judgments, blessings if they obeyed and judgments if they rebelled. Although the Jews knew this, they continued in their sins and rejected God's warning.

People today who depend on baptism, spiritual gifts, and other church stuff are no different than the Jews in Jeremiah's day. They think that those things would make them special in the eyes of God and guaranteed their eternal salvation regardless of their spiritual relationship with the Lord. They are the ones who are uncircumcised in the heart.

Acts 7:51 You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you.

D. FALSE GODS

Jeremiah 10:3-10 For the customs of the peoples are futile; For one cuts a tree from the forest, The work of the hands of the workman, with the ax. 4 They decorate it with silver and gold; They fasten it with nails and hammers So that it will not topple. 5 They are upright, like a palm tree, And they cannot speak; They must be carried, Because they cannot go by themselves. Do not be afraid of them, For they cannot do evil, Nor can they do any good." 6 Inasmuch as there is none like You, O Lord (You are great, and Your name is great in might), 7 Who would not fear You, O King of the nations? For this is Your rightful due. For among all the wise men of the nations, And in all their kingdoms, There is none like You.

Jeremiah 10:10 But the Lord is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King. At His wrath the earth will tremble, And the nations will not be able to endure His indignation.

These verses remind me of the idols I used to see in Seoul and the surrounding areas, South Korea. Some were grotesque, some were downright scary looking. When I was growing up, Buddhism and the folk religions were in and they placed many idols around all the important landmarks. I used to wonder, "Who make these idols?"

Our contemporary idols aren't ugly as were the pagan idols in Jeremiah's day, but they capture just as much affection and do just as much damage. Whatever we worship and serve other than the true and living God is an idol, whether it's an expensive house or car, the latest gizmo electronic equipment, a boat, your spouse, a girlfriend or boyfriend, your children, a career, or a bank account, etc. That on which I center my attention and affection and for which I am willing to sacrifice is my god, and if it isn't Jesus Christ, then it's an idol.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) Have nothing to do with any theology that minimizes God's holiness and tolerates people's deliberate sinfulness.

2) Obedience to the teachings of the Bible is an expression of our love for the Lord.

Possessing the Bible is not the same as practicing what the Bible teaches.