

HE STOOD ALONE

14th April 2017

Good Friday Communion Service

Reading: Matthew 27:1 & 11-26

In the Bible, we read of a wonderful man God told to speak his word in the temple courtyard. As the people came to worship this man spoke out, "Repent, turn from your evil ways and turn back to God, otherwise this temple will be destroyed". Now these words fell on hard hearts and deaf ears. So religious leaders sized him and in hastily prepared trial cried out, "You must die"... How did it end? What was this man's name?... Jeremiah the prophet.



This morning as we remember our Lord who also faced a mob crying out, "You must die", we're going to look at what happened to Jeremiah. We're going to explore what's the same for there is much the same but one key difference and this key difference sheds great light on the cross and meaning of Good Friday. So, as you turn to Jeremiah 26 a reminder of who he was. Jeremiah lived in Jerusalem some 600 years before Jesus. This incident happened not long before the Babylonians captured the city, exiled many and set up a puppet king. In his patience, time and time again God had Jeremiah call his people to repent from their evil and turn back to him before this calamity would befall. Picking up in verse 1

Early in the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, this word came from the Lord: "This is what the Lord says: Stand in the courtyard of the Lord's house and speak to all the people of the towns of Judah who come to worship in the house of the Lord. Tell them everything I command you; do not omit a word. Perhaps they will listen and each will turn from his evil way. Then I will relent and not bring on them the disaster I was planning because of the evil they have done. Jeremiah 26:1-3

What was the evil they had done?. Two things. First, they're worshiping idols alongside God - not instead of but alongside. Secondly, they're neglecting, even oppressing, the poor. Both clearly violate God's that can be summed up as - love God with all your heart and your neighbour as yourself. They're doing neither. So, what word did God have Jeremiah to speak?

Say to them, 'This is what the Lord says: If you do not listen to me and follow my law, which I have set before you, and if you do not listen to the words of my servants the prophets, whom I have sent to you again and again (though you have not listened), then I will make this house like Shiloh and this city an object of cursing among all the nations of the earth.'" Jeremiah 26:4-6

He's saying that he will send the Babylonians to destroy the city and temple too. So, what happened? Well, Jeremiah did what he was told.

The priests, the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speak these words in the house of the Lord. Jeremiah 26:7

However, God's people were not impressed. For the thing with idols is they do not take threats lightly. If we have an idol in our heart and it's threatened then look out - all hell can break loose.

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! Why do you prophesy in the Lord's name that this house will be like Shiloh and this city will be desolate and deserted?" And all the people crowded around Jeremiah in the house of the Lord. Jeremiah 26:8-9

So Jeremiah is seized by an angry mob, and in a hastily prepared trial he's found guilty. And in this trial the priests and the prophets act as the prosecution.

Then the priests and the prophets said to the officials and all the people, "This man should be sentenced to death because he has prophesied against this city. You have heard it with your own ears!" Jeremiah 26:11

Jeremiah remains unfazed. He stands firm saying, "for in truth the Lord has sent me to you to speak all these words in your hearing." Jeremiah 26:15

Now let's pause for a moment and see the similarities between Jeremiah and Jesus' trial before Pilate.

Like Jeremiah, Jesus ministered in the temple. Like Jeremiah, Jesus preached repentance - turning back to God. Like Jeremiah, Jesus' message upset people. Like Jeremiah Jesus was sized by a mob. Like Jeremiah, Jesus was accused by religious leaders. Like Jeremiah, both religious leaders and the crowd cried out "You must die!", or for Jesus "Crucify him!".

And we know how this played out for Jesus, but what happened to Jeremiah?

Then the officials and all the people said to the priests and the prophets, "This man should not be sentenced to death! He has spoken to us in the name of the Lord our God." Jeremiah 26:16

What?! The crowd stood up for Jeremiah. The crowd and elders insist that Jeremiah not die. Next we read some elders even mounted a defense – verse 17-19 and listen how the chapter ends

... Furthermore, Ahikam son of Shaphan supported Jeremiah, and so he was not handed over to the people to be put to death. Jeremiah 26:27

There we have it. Both Jeremiah and Jesus were obedient to God, both got into trouble with religious leaders, both stood before crowd baying for their death - but Jeremiah was spared and Jesus was not. Why? Because Jeremiah had an advocate. He had people who stood up, and stood alongside, him. These advocates had authority, integrity and were listened too. This was God's will, as it was for Jesus

For though Jesus, went to the cross hated by enemies, rejected by the crowds, abandoned by his friends it was God's will. Even when God turned his back on Jesus who cried, "My God, why have you forsaken me", it was God's plan. Jesus went to the cross with no advocate so he could be our advocate... You see without the cross, at our death we would face our Maker alone. We would be brought into his presence and his judgment would be right and just - and we would be condemned. Indeed, without the cross we would have no advocate. No one to stand and speak a word for us, on our behalf. But Jesus stood alone at his trial, so we can stand before God forgiven made right with him. Yes, the Good News of the Gospel is because of the cross we can stand before God accepted and dearly loved. Why? Because we have one who advocates for us. For Romans 8:1 declares...

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. Romans 8:1-2

And further on...

Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Romans 8:34

Not only was Christ our advocate on the cross but is advocate today. He's at the right hand of God, advocating for you and I. He's interceding for us, reminding God that when he looks on us he looks first on him who died for us. Reminding his Heavenly Father of all he did, all he suffered, all he gave up that we might not be condemned but have life - eternal and abundant.

Indeed, this Good Friday we celebrate all our advocate won for us, for

...in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, either height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:37-39

This is victory won on the cross by Christ our Master, Saviour Friend... and advocate. Glory be to his name. Amen and Amen.