

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Jeremiah 28:5-9

Prophet Jeremiah stood up to prophet Hananiah in front of the priests and all the people who were in God's Temple that day. Prophet Jeremiah said, "Wonderful! Would that it were true—that God would validate your preaching by bringing the Temple furnishings and all the exiles back from Babylon. But listen to me, listen closely. Listen to what I tell both you and all the people here today: The old prophets, the ones before our time, preached judgment against many countries and kingdoms, warning of war and disaster and plague. So any prophet who preaches that everything is just fine and there's nothing to worry about stands out like a sore thumb. We'll wait and see. If it happens, it happens—and then we'll know that God sent him."

In September 1938, a man who lived on Long Island was able one day to satisfy a life-long ambition by purchasing for himself a very fine barometer. When the instrument arrived at his home, he was extremely disappointed to find that the indicating needle appeared to be stuck, pointing to the sector marked "Hurricane."

After shaking the barometer very vigorously several times, its new owner sat down and wrote a scorching letter to the store from which he had purchased the instrument, and on the following morning, on his way to his office in New York, he mailed the letter.

That evening he returned to Long Island, to find not only the barometer missing, but his house also. The barometer's needle had been right—there was a hurricane!

The biblical prophets had the same problem, not everyone believed their prophecies. A prophet's job was never easy. People usually did not like what a prophet had to say...even though the prophet was a messenger for God...communicating God's will. Jeremiah's message was no different in popularity...but it was different in content.

If you read through the writings of the prophets, which by the way are not placed in chronological order in the bible...but in the order of size of the book... you find that they are communicating warnings about remaining faithful to their covenant with God...and if they didn't...there would be negative consequences, the greatest of which would be living in exile.

Normally the role of a prophet was to pray and intercede on behalf of the people, however, in Jeremiah 7:16 God instructs Jeremiah to no longer do so. Instead, Jeremiah's message declared that the people had officially broken their covenant with God; and all the warnings to remain faithful had been exhausted. Now the consequence of the nation falling into the hands of Babylon was certain and the people were not to fight it.

In Jeremiah 27 we read that Jeremiah placed a yoke on his neck as a sign of the impending oppression of King Nebuchadnezzar's rule upon the region. Anyone who did resist the Babylonian exile would suffer more severe consequences. No one really wanted to hear Jeremiah's message. No one wanted to hear that time had run out...no one believed his prophecy, and there were people who decided to ignore Jeremiah's warning.

I find this dilemma a reality in our world today. There are many different messages pelting us today that seek to persuade us that if something does not work for us, if something does not benefit us or make us happy, then it is to be ignored. This is especially an issue when we are the ones who brought on problems ourselves because we take our eyes off the goal of following God's will.

Mark Driscoll in his counseling will ask this question. What is your deepest desire? One day he had a man in his office who wanted counseling, a man who had been active in church for

years. He was considering leaving his wife for another woman. So Mark asked him, ‘What is your deepest desire?’ Is your desire to obey God, or is it to leave your wife for this other woman. The man went away and thought about it and came back and said, ‘I want to leave my wife and be with this other woman.’ Mark Driscoll concluded the man wasn’t saved. He needed to respond to the Gospel. The man probably knew the facts of the gospel well, but he did not know God. He needed a new heart. One that desired to do God’s will.

There’s no denying that remaining faithful to God’s will is tough. It means allowing God’s word to rule the decisions we make on a daily basis, what we choose to do, how we treat people, words that we choose say. It means making personal sacrifices and doing things we don’t feel like doing. But if we are not careful, we may be swayed from our commitment to Christ and our obedience to God by something that makes us more comfortable and, in our minds, at least, more successful.

There are many messages being sent out in our culture today by what we could...or should call false prophets. They are messages that appease people’s desires. The Bible is full of warnings of those who will arise from the discontent of people and announce a more pleasing message that will lead people down a murky God-less path. In today’s story Jeremiah warns the people that it will be the false prophets who will announce a quick end to Babylonian rule (27:16-17), which is exactly what the people wanted to hear.

Hananiah was that false prophet. In dramatic fashion, Hananiah goes on to take the yoke from Jeremiah’s neck and breaks it as a sign that the yoke of King Nebuchadnezzar’s rule, the Babylonians’ rule, will come to an end within two years (28:10-11). Then Hananiah announces, “Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two years I will bring back to this place all the vessels of the LORD’s house, which King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon took away from this place and carried to Babylon” (Jeremiah 28:2-3), these words are in direct opposition to the message of Jeremiah, but it was exactly what the people wanted to hear.

When we compare the style and presentations of Jeremiah and Hananiah’s messages the distinction between true and false prophecy is not obvious. Hananiah’s prophetic style is also consistent with that of the other traditional biblical prophets.

Hananiah’s style follows the format of announcing a salvation promise like when he said, “Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel,” and he then performs a prophetic sign by breaking Jeremiah’s yoke, and he concludes his speech with the formula, “says the LORD.” The long and the short of it is that it would have been very difficult to tell that Hananiah was a false prophet, especially since his message was more appealing to the people.

We have plenty of false prophets in today’s world, and not all of them...like Hananiah...are obviously deceptive. The current social, international and political atmosphere is causing a lot of anxiety in people today and leaving people to desire some certainty. The secularists tell us that the Bible is no longer relevant to our world. Atheists would have us believe that if there really is a God innocent men, women and children would not be dying at the hands of terrorism.

Many politicians send a message through their examples that cooperation, mutuality, and compromise are signs of powerlessness. Some television evangelists promote wealth as a reward for faithfulness. There are organizations and radical leaders that advocate, and instigate violence as appropriate and acceptable behavior, even a right, to get what they want.

It’s easy to think that only the nonbeliever or the vulnerable fall prey to false prophets such as these, but the reality is anyone willing to listen to the reasoning of people such as these

can be swayed to buy into and support their rhetoric, even those who feel they are faithfully following God. Remember, the message of a false prophet is deceptive, sometimes sounding like a Christian message. We need to be on our guard, always making sure our beliefs are ultimately built on the teachings of Christ and definitely not contradicting them.

In 28:8 Jeremiah accuses Hananiah of ignoring the prophetic tradition that warned of judgment due to covenant disobedience and announced that exile would not be short-lived (e.g. Hosea 3:4). Did you notice that Jeremiah, in a sarcastic tone, said he wishes Hananiah's announcement to come to pass in 28:6?

Yet because he is a true prophet, Jeremiah provides a counterargument in 28:7-8, even though he knew it was unpopular to his audience. He rests his ultimate trust in the fulfillment of God's will to affirm true prophecy which is exactly what happened.

When our son, Nicholas, was little, he loved bowling. Every time a bowling tournament was on television, we let him watch it. The only problem was that when the program was over, he got upset because he wanted to watch more. I thought warning him before the program that this program had an ending would help solve this problem; however, it did not.

When the program ended, we tried to explain to him that there was nothing we could do to make the program continue. We tried to explain the ~~tv~~ guide did not have any listings for more bowling programs. We were not lying to him...and no amount of wishing or crying on his part could change things.

In today's story no matter how unhappy it made the Israelites to be taken into exile...Hananiah's lies were not going to change God's plan. It was right there...written in the covenant made between God and God's people. The death of Hananiah proved his prophecy to be false. Discernment is required from God's people to determine the true word of the LORD.

Sometimes God's prophets speak words that seem utterly contradictory to our sensibilities. In such cases it may not be that the prophet has gotten God's message confused, but rather God's people have gotten their priorities reversed. Sometimes it is the job of the prophet to say seemingly nonsensical statements such as, "Blessed are the poor, Blessed are those who mourn, Blessed are the persecuted," in order to proclaim to the world that an upside-down kingdom has come in Jesus.

True or false prophets...they are both out there. Can you tell the difference? Let us be listening carefully...with discerning prayer, with knowledge of the scriptures, with reliance on the Holy Spirit for the true voice of God...so that we don't fall victims to the enticing, distorted lies of the world...and lose sight of God. Amen.