

Sermon Draft for September 22, 2024

Text: Jeremiah 11:18–20

Sermon: “Committed”

The book of Jeremiah speaks to the present age. Jeremiah's life and the book that bears his name, while lived and produced some 2600 years ago, describe with emotion and drama the most tumultuous time in the history of Israel, when the fate of nations was being sealed. In the contemporary world, where evil, dishonesty, violence, injustice, treachery, and nations raging against nations all press upon us to produce a sense of doom and despair, it is easy to see the relevance of Jeremiah for God's people.

The rebellion against God and idolatry of Jeremiah's time, which are still in clear evidence all around, cause God's words of warning and hope communicated through Jeremiah to have a modern ring.

The setting of our text is a time when the Lord's wrath is kindled because of the apostasy of the people, who have chased after innumerable false gods, including Baal.

To what are you committed? What kinds of commitments have you made in life? What are some of the things that are most important to you? We as human beings often have causes to which we're committed. It may be something small, or it may be something grandiose, even world changing. It's inspiring to hear about people who have made great sacrifices and overcome enormous obstacles for their cause.

Dr. Paul Farmer grew up in a rather impoverished environment in an old bus his father had retrofitted as rudimentary housing for the family, which included five children. Although Paul came from a humble home, he was extremely intelligent. His intellect was recognized by his teachers at the local public school. Some would say he had a photographic memory. He did so well in school that he was easily admitted to Duke University and then Harvard Medical School, where he received both his MD and a PhD.

His accomplishments are too many to list here, but his main cause, to which he dedicated his entire career, despite the opportunities before him as a Harvard Medical School professor, or perhaps to make tremendous sums of money as a researcher, was to find ways to combat major health problems, such as tuberculosis, among the poorest of the poor.

He started his work in Haiti, but soon his reach went far beyond to all around the globe. Eventually he became a world-renowned expert on public health among impoverished people. Already when he was only in his mid-forties, a *New York Times* bestseller was written about him: *Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, a Man Who Would Cure the World*. In 2017, the actor Matt Damon produced a documentary film about him called *Bending the Arc*.

Unfortunately, in February of 2022, Dr. Farmer died of a heart attack while working on a health project in Rwanda. He was only sixty-two.

Farmer spent his entire life committed to the cause of improving healthcare for the disadvantaged. To be “committed to a cause” is to be all in for the sake of that cause.

In today’s Old Testament Reading, we get a touching look into the life of the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah faced many obstacles in his ministry and often went to the Lord God to plead his case in the face of all the adversity he had to confront. That’s why he’s known as the weeping prophet. He was betrayed by his friends; he is surrounded by deceit and treachery. He cries out to the Lord in ways that remind us of Christ’s own betrayal, persecution, and suffering. And yet, he is committed to the cause to which God called him, to make known his Word to the people of Judah, to call Judah to repent of its apostasy and idolatry. In the face of many reasons to despair, Jeremiah clings to the rock of his salvation.

And so, while Dr. Paul Farmer was committed to the cause of improving life on this earth, Jeremiah was committed to an even greater cause: the cause of showing the way to eternal life.

Jeremiah is a powerful example to us as we navigate the trials and challenges of our own lives as the people of God. As Jeremiah committed his cause to the Lord, let us commit our cause to the Lord God.

The Lord God knows our plight (vs 18–19). Sometimes in life, as we face hardships, injustice, or persecution, we can conclude that God is absent, silent, or doesn't care. We wonder why we might need to face a certain challenge, cancer, blindness, inability to get around the list is long. Sometimes we might even feel betrayed by our own family or friends.

In the case of Jeremiah, it's the Lord God who reveals to him the scheming and treachery of his friends. God knew of their scheming before Jeremiah did. In Jeremiah's case, the Lord revealed the murderous plots to him directly. God knows the challenges and troubles we face, even before we do.

Sometimes we can experience the emotions that Jeremiah felt, like a lamb being led to slaughter. God cares about what happens in this world, and he invites us to bring our cares and concerns humbly to him, and he will deliver us (Psalm 54:7).

The Lord God judges in righteousness (v 20a). The Lord God cares about what happens in the world and what is happening in our lives. Despite his troubles, Jeremiah proclaims that the Lord God is righteous and judges in righteousness. This means he judges in holiness and love. Sometimes it can look to us as if that's not the case, when evildoers seem to prosper and good people do suffer. But the Lord God sees way beyond what we can see. This is even more true when we suffer for his name's sake.

The suffering we face because of our commitment to the Lord is something we can count on (John 16:1–4a). Jeremiah complains to God that though he tried to do as the Lord commanded, calling people to repentance, the people did not want to hear it.

In the people's anger, when they were confronted with their sin of apostasy and idolatry, having turned from the one true God to false gods, their reaction was to hatch a plot to obliterate completely Jeremiah, his message, and his name from the face of the earth (v 19b). When confronted with the truth, the reaction of Jeremiah's people was to be blinded by the error of their ways and want to be rid of him.

It seems we live in a world that is becoming angrier all the time. People often are blinded to the truth that is right before their very eyes. This is especially true when it comes to respecting the Lord God.

Despite the fierce opposition, Jeremiah clung to the truth that God judges in righteousness. Jeremiah is confident that the vengeance of the Lord God will be upon his enemies. But the vengeance of the Lord is not like some kind of venomous, angry, over-the-top outburst, like in the Rambo movies.

The vengeance of the Lord is fair retribution for those who have fallen away from all that God had given them and who chased after other gods. Those other gods can be anything we put our trust in above all other things, and so we can fall into idolatry also.

The Lord God brings about justice (v 20b). Despite the harsh reaction of the people of Judah to his preaching, Jeremiah clung to the truth that the Lord God is righteous and will bring about justice.

Even six hundred years before Jesus' birth, Jeremiah put his confidence in the lasting and final justice that God would provide in the coming Messiah, the Savior, who would take away the sin of the world. The Lord God judges "***the heart and the mind***" (v 20).

We may not be worshiping Baal or other spiritual beings, and by outward appearances we may not be plotting the murder of God's prophet, but the Lord God judges the heart, our innermost thoughts and desires (1 Samuel 16:7).

Everyone falls short of what God demands. Nevertheless, the Lord also provided the way for our minds and hearts to be washed clean and seen as perfect in his sight. It is through a simple trust in the perfect life, atoning death, and victorious rising again of Jesus Christ.

Jeremiah put his trust in that same Savior, the one he knew was to come, and thus he could in confidence commit his cause to the Lord God. Despite all the troubles of his life, the forgiveness, life, and salvation of the Lord was his. This did not mean things were easier for Jeremiah in this life, but he knew the Lord God would preserve and protect his faithful, and to that cause he could commit himself.

Dr. Paul Farmer, who dedicated his life to helping improve the physical lives of impoverished people around the world. And he, too, faced many obstacles and criticisms. In the case of Jeremiah, we see something even much greater: a commitment to the cause of bringing eternal life to his people.

Jeremiah's commitment to the Lord God, even when he faced the treachery and persecution by his friends and family, is an example for us of what it means to commit ourselves to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Just as Jeremiah faced hostility because he committed his cause to the Lord God, we also will probably come up against opposition and hostility because of our commitment to the cause of the Gospel as we live out our faith in a world that seems increasingly to be in conflict with the Word of God. Just as Jeremiah committed his cause to the Lord God, knowing that God was his strength and shield, so we also can confidently and humbly commit ourselves to the cause of the Lord God, who would do so much, even give us his Son.

So let us commit ourselves to Christ and His Gospel, knowing that God is faithful, just, loving, and caring, despite the obstacles we face in this life.

Amen