

## Sermon Draft

**Text: Jeremiah 26:8–15**

**Sermon: “The Crisis Before Us”**

On this day, Christians continue their annual journey into the depths of Lent. On this Second Sunday in Lent, we descend deeper in their journey into a world of spiritual poverty and desolation. In particular, we see the desolation wreaked by rejecting God’s Word preached and incarnate: “***This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate, without inhabitant***” (Jeremiah 26:9, Old Testament Reading). “***Behold, your house is forsaken***” (Luke 13:35, Gospel).

Christians descend into a world with enemies all around, unbelievers, those who are hostile toward prophets and believers of faith in Christ, and the devil with his constant evil, temptations, and lies. Yet, as the Christian descends into Lent God calls us to repentance and to fix their eyes on Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.

While God's Word is preached in the desolate desert of Lent, the Holy Spirit does create and sustain our saving faith in Christ through that preached Word, with the sure hope and trust that Christ comes to save us, even as we pray, ***"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"***

The Northern Kingdom of Israel had already fallen to the Assyrians in 722 BC. Approximately twenty-two years after the event of our text, Jeremiah 26, the Southern Kingdom of Judah would fall to Babylon and also be taken into captivity. Israel forgot who their God was and what he had done for them. They forgot his commandments in response to his grace in delivering them out of Egypt. False prophets rose up to speak what itching ears wanted to hear, while the faithful prophets proclaiming God's Word were mistreated, beaten, and killed.

Thus, Jesus' words in Luke 13, ***"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!"*** (v 34). Jeremiah warned of enemies from the north. He called God's people to return to the Lord and repent or receive judgment and exile.

Jeremiah accused Judah of her idols, her sins, and her coming doom. Yet, even now, Jeremiah will once again call his kinsmen to repentance while offering glimpses of messianic hope and salvation.

October 16–28, 1962, is probably not known to most people today as well as it should be. In those thirteen days, a nuclear world war was averted. It is remembered as the Cuban Missile Crisis. The Soviet Union was shipping nuclear missiles to Cuba, only ninety miles from the US coastline. Soviet ships had every intention of breaching a US naval blockade and delivering their deadly cargoes. An American reconnaissance plane was shot down over Cuba, and a US invasion force was ready to strike. The United States Secretary of Defense later said, “I thought it was the last Saturday I would ever see.” But through intense negotiations between John F. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev the Soviet ships turned around. No nuclear missiles landed or launched. No World War III. Crisis averted.

In our text today, God's people are reaching a crisis point for their very survival as a nation, and God sends the prophet Jeremiah to speak some very harsh words. The question is, will they heed those words and the crisis be averted?

Whether we today know this as well as we should, we also are ever on the brink of a crisis one of nuclear proportions, one that also threatens our very survival. Look at what is happening in Ukraine. The question is the same as for Jeremiah's hearers in our text: Will God's Word preached avert the crisis of our eternal disaster?

Despising the preaching of God's Word creates an eternal crisis, threatening desolation, and damnation. Look how may have taken to despising God's Word in the world around us. That was the point God's people, the kingdom of Judah, had reached, because they were rejecting the Word of God; they were rejecting Yahweh himself! Jeremiah had just spoken all that the Lord had commanded him to speak to the people.

Through Jeremiah, God was accusing them of going after other gods, including licentiousness, sexual sins, in that evil worship. They were turning their backs on Yahweh, who had redeemed them out of Egypt and brought them to the Promised Land.

Through Jeremiah, the Great I Am was pronouncing desolation for Jerusalem and the temple. ***"This house," "the temple, "shall be like Shiloh."*** Some 450 years before, Israel had taken the ark of the covenant, the very presence of God, from its place in Shiloh into battle against the Philistines as a good-luck charm.

This was not pleasing to God, so he allowed the ark to be captured by the Philistines and Shiloh to be destroyed. Because of Judah's sin and stubborn impenitence, Jeremiah proclaimed that the temple and Jerusalem would be the same, desolate, slain, laid to ruins, dried up, destroyed, taken away! This temple had become Judah's idol! People don't take too kindly to their idols being threatened and taken away. But God is not to be toyed with; his patience was running out.

The enemies of God were hearing their judgment, and they reacted with hate and murder.

It's quite a remarkable scene. It all happens at once, Jeremiah finishes preaching God's Word; the corrupt priests and false prophets lay hold of him and accuse him and threaten to kill him. And like a playground fight about to break out, all the people rush to gather around, the officials hurry to their seats at the place where criminals are judged, and the priests and prophets demand death for this one who prophesied against the temple and city they made their god.

There, before the hostile crowd, Jeremiah tells them that he speaks for Yahweh, and he calls them to repent. If they repent, if they turn to the Lord, God will relent of the disaster he's pronounced upon them. But if they refuse! For Judah and Jeremiah, this is the moment of crisis either for peaceful resolution or for catastrophe.

From the time of Adam and Eve's fall into sin, the whole world teeters on the edge of a crisis of nuclear proportions; we are all headed toward eternal catastrophe in hell. We have not given up our gods. We worship our carnal desires. We put our trust in things of plastic and glass and steel. We lie and cheat for temporal things that last such a short time. This is rebellion against God.

We have heard the voice of pastors preaching God's Word accuse us of our sins and call us to repentance, yet we are so turned in on ourselves that we have neither the desire nor the will to do anything but sin. And as we descend into this journey of Lent and continue to live all the days of our lives, we know we are in a crisis, we know the wages of sin is eternal death, we know we have been brought forth in iniquity, and we know we have sinned and done what is evil in Yahweh's sight.

The crisis is before us! We are lost and condemned creatures. No negotiations, no “trying to do better” on our part can bring a peaceful resolution. Ah! But there is one way out of this crisis that threatens our condemnation.

The living Word made flesh intervenes in the crisis. When we spoke of Jeremiah being brought before the priests and prophets and all the people, did this sound familiar? Could you not see, and could you not hear, the Pharisees and Sadducees, the scribes and chief priests and all the people scurrying to their places and bringing Jesus before Pilate and demanding his death? Jesus was speaking all that the Father had commanded him, and the Father even instructed the people: ***“This is my Son, whom I love; listen to him.”*** God had sent many prophets like Jeremiah and Isaiah and Micah and they were murdered. As Jesus said, ***“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!”*** (Luke 13:34). God sends many prophets into the vineyard to preach repentance and salvation, and each is beaten and killed. Now he sends his Son, God in the flesh.

This is the only way the crisis of our damnation could be averted if God himself were to live the commandments perfectly in our place, take the punishment of our sins into his own flesh, and shed his blood in payment for our sin and hell. It is God's love for us that averts this crisis, ***"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son. . . . For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him"*** (John 3:16–17).

The Lord relents of this epic crisis by shedding his innocent blood for you and me. On the cross, Jesus gathers his wayward children as a hen gathers her brood under her wings. On the cross, Jesus dies desolate, as the Father forsakes him in our place and claims us as his own. On the cross, Jesus gifts us with our citizenship in heaven, even as we now await his blessed return to take us to heaven forever. On the cross, Jesus declares, ***"It is finished!"*** The debt is paid; your sins are forgiven. The crisis is averted!

For us, then, the crisis is averted when we believe the preached Word that calls us to repentance and delivers to us the living Word. It turned out, in the verses immediately after our text, cooler heads prevailed; Jeremiah wasn't killed. But twenty-two years later, Judah was dragged off into captivity in Babylon. The temple was razed; Jerusalem was destroyed just as Jeremiah had warned. The people had never really taken God's Word to heart.

Paul wrote to the Philippians in our Epistle, "***Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved***" (Philippians 4:1). "Stand firm." This means we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith. This means we cling to him throughout this desolate journey of life whether we're in sadness or joy, whether we're prosperous or poor, whether we're living in the joy of life or suffering ills and persecution. Jesus is our joy and treasure. He is the one thing needful. He is our life and our salvation!

And we hear the voice of his prophets today, pastors who preach God's Word. When we are convicted of our sins, we repent. Our entire life is a life of repentance as the redeemed children of God: The old Adam in us is by daily contrition and repentance drowned and dies with all sins and evil desires, and a new man daily emerges and arises to live before God in righteousness and purity forever. This is who we are as children for whom the crisis of damnation is averted children of faith and repentance and love toward God and our neighbor.

History bears out many crises that have been averted and thousands of lives saved. But there is none like the crisis of sin and death by which Jesus' death and resurrection, and this alone averted a crisis of such epic proportions, a crisis for your soul and mine. We often feel that crisis now, but the final resolution will come on the Last Day when Christ will transform our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body.

Crisis averted!

Amen