

**It's Not Easy**  
**Jeremiah 15:15**

*O LORD, You know; remember me and visit me, and take vengeance for me on my persecutors.  
In Your forbearance take me not away; know that for Your sake I bear reproach.*

Brothers and sisters in Christ, just this week an interview of a well known athlete was made public. Part of the interview dealt with the faith life of the athlete. The athlete was brought up in a Christian home, but he has now given that up for more of a vague spirituality. In his mind, he thinks that many key teachings of the Christian faith are too harsh and drive people away and that many Christians are not truly accepting of others.

Over the last several years many good Christian people have had to close their own businesses. Two such examples are a baker and a photographer. Because of their beliefs, one would not bake a cake and another would not photograph a gay marriage. Since marriage is a choice and homosexuality is against God's standard of holiness, neither would give in. Yet because of the intolerance of lawyers and others, they had to give up what they enjoyed.

Many years ago I was even lectured about the Christian life by another Christian because I said that speaking in tongues was not a necessary part of being a Christian. I also was told that I was too harsh to those who believed it was necessary.

The pressures of being a Christian come at us from all sides – from people who call themselves Christian to those who don't. People of faith in the almighty God – like you and I – would like to be assured that we live and speak our faith freely. But rarely has it been easy.

All things considered, the Christian Church enjoyed a respected place in society for well over 1,000 years. Theology was even considered the lynchpin of learning, for all other subjects flowed out of knowing God. But even then people despised the teachings of the Church. Even back to the Old Testament, you will find devotion to God mocked and persecuted.

While any Old Testament prophet could identify with us, Jeremiah is one of the most notable. He wasn't the first to prophesy of Israel's destruction, but he was around while it was going on. His message was one of warning for Israelite's leaders and people: "Your sins have made God angry and He will deliver you into the hands of Babylon."

Many Israelites heard this warning and considered Jeremiah only a prophet of doom – the "sky is falling" type. They wanted prosperity. They wanted good times. They wanted God's favor without their commitment. Sound familiar to our day?

What they missed was the real message. God tasked Jeremiah with this difficult mission because He wanted people to repent. It shows us that the proclamation of God has been quite consistent for thousands of years. The first step in a relationship with Him is to confess sins.

The people didn't, and they despised the words of Jeremiah. That made him an outcast. He was behind the times and told that he didn't know what he was talking about.

And we see today where that led Jeremiah. In despair he turns to God, but is unsure that he should. Though God's words were a joy to him and he stayed away from the company of evildoers, he feels the weight of his rejection. He even wonders if God is a deceitful brook.

What is our world's problem? What problem do we all have? We're dying. Even the most strident unbeliever knows death happens. The reason is both simple and hard for many to fathom: sin. The answer – God's mercy in Jesus Christ – is somehow offensive to people.

Do you know that death is near, but wonder if eternal life is true? Do you work with people whose speech and actions are anything but Christian and you have a hard time fitting in? Do you do try to live in harmony, knowing it doesn't save you, but also don't feel rewarded for your effort? Have you been lectured that nothing is a sin, that Jesus isn't the only way to heaven, or there was no resurrection from the dead? If so, you're in the same position as Jeremiah.

Before you lash out at God or others, the first step is still the same: confess your sins to God – of frustration, fear, jealousy or anything plaguing you. By itself confession won't save you, but it reminds you why your only hope can be in the God of the Bible. Yes, I know it seems at times like God isn't there or that He's not listening or that He's not changing people's hearts. Being committed to Him is not easy, but only in Him do we find life, a word of life we can share.

But when you feel like God doesn't care or isn't supporting the mission He has given you, you can remember those words He gave to Jeremiah. "I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you, but they shall not prevail over you, for I am with you to save you and deliver you, declares the LORD."

God knows that the mission He gives you isn't easy because people don't want to admit that they sin or that there is only one God. But He didn't ask Jeremiah or you to stand on your own. He will fortify, save, deliver, and redeem you.

Your fortification is Christ, the solid rock. When people despise what you say and stand for, it is really Christ they are despising. But He did not take on human flesh for popularity. He came to save you from the grasp of the ruthless and wicked.

Jesus is an example of dealing with persecution. He faced it from family, Pharisees, and His own disciples. But He never let it stop Him.

He couldn't, for He is the only Savior of the world. He is the only truth. We are not good, no matter how much we think so. So He took the most brutal persecution, crucifixion. Only Jesus saves us from ourselves and God's eternal wrath. He shed His blood so that it could cover you and protect you. He rose to life to be with you always. But you are God's, for His sake.

Whether you are rebuked for being a Christian or your life is ended for it, salvation in Christ cannot be taken away by the words of others. God's truth remains that your sin is forgiven

and all evil is defeated. Those who do not believe will be condemned. Yet when you repent and believe you will be given the true profit of life eternal with Christ.

To help us God gives us the fruits of Christ's death and resurrection through Word and worship, for times come when faith falters or we become bitter at God or those who seek to hurt us. God is not deceiving us. Instead, He is preparing us to live as His servants.

Because of Jesus you have a word – God's Word – that has power. It calls sinners to repentance. It gives the outcast a home. It makes the apathetic pay attention. It gives hope and life to those who would be dead without it.

We pray it never comes to this, but the day is coming when God's vengeance falls upon all our persecutors. Because faith in Jesus separates believers from unbelievers, those who have denied the truth about Jesus will suffer eternally. God will not let the persecutors win. In fact, Jesus' resurrection assures us they cannot. His rising confirms that evil loses.

But being assured of God's protection isn't where we stay. Today's Epistle tells us how we are to live. Inspired by His Word, prepared by Baptism, and strengthened by Communion, we take the Gospel of forgiveness, peace, and love to all places and people. We can see how despairing people in Texas need God. Yet even those against Christianity need Him. And if your Christianity is questioned we still know that we stand forgiven before God for the sake of Jesus.

In Jeremiah's day many perished for not listening to God. Sadly, it's still happening. But some did listen and repent and were saved, just as is happening now. God visits His people with salvation, for Christ took the cross for you. Nothing will prevail but God's goodness and love.

Amen.