

Jeremiah 36
The Politically Incorrect Prophet Jeremiah
Speaking Truth to Power
WRCoB 6.13.21

Censorship is in the news these days.

Facebook suspended Donald Trump's
Facebook and Instagram accounts for 2 years
Due to the "risk of public safety"

Also, in the news, this past week
The Nigerian government placed an indefinite ban
On Twitter.

Because Twitter deleted tweets made by President Buhari.

From social media censoring politicians
To governments censoring social media.

Each side seeks to control
What information gets to the public.

This past year, we've seen the censorship
Of six of Dr Seuss' books

And earlier such books as Mark's Twain's Huckleberry Finn.

History has shown the burning of books
As people in power suppress information.

Censorship is also happening in other areas of our lives

From the banning of Project 1619 from school curriculum
To seminaries connected to the Southern Baptists
Banning the teaching of Critical Race Theory

People in positions of power want to slant what people hear.

So it shouldn't be too much of a surprise
For the king in our Scripture Lesson today

To seek to control what was coming out of the mouth
Of the politically-incorrect Jeremiah

It was not the first time that powers-that-be
Would seek to censor something or someone
Nor, obviously, will it be the last.

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Today is the third reading of Jeremiah in our sermon series.

It is the third look into Jeremiah's attempt
To sway and convince the people of Judah
Of their waywardness
And their need to repent.

From the beginning, Jeremiah claimed every word
He spoke came from God.

That he, Jeremiah, was only God's mouthpiece.

The situation at hand was becoming desperate.

The destruction of Judah inevitable
Babylonia was at Judah's doorsteps
Having already defeated neighboring countries.

Destruction seemed imminent.

Even still, fate would stay her hand
If the people changed their ways.

Even still, there was still a small glimmer of hope.

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Our first reading took us to Jeremiah at the temple.

He was preaching at its gate as people entered worship.

He pleaded with them to change their ways.

Their response? No response.

So Jeremiah considered another approach.

He gathered as many people as he could
Outside the potter's house.

They watched as the potter
Worked a piece of clay on the potter's wheel.

He was having trouble with the piece in hand

And finally, grew frustrated and smashed it
And started over again.

Jeremiah turned to the people
And said that this is what God will do
If you don't change your evil ways.

Their response? Ho hum!

Now this.

If the people won't listen to what Jeremiah has to say
If they don't "get it" through a graphic illustration

And now that the palace officials black-labeled Jeremiah
And he could no longer be seen
At the palace, temple or public square.

Then there needed to be another way
To convince the people.

God was not done.

God would continue to warn the people
Even up to the very last second
Before the hammer of Babylon came down.

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So God tells Jeremiah to have Baruch
Write down everything in a scroll
All that God wanted to say to the people.

Twenty years, Jeremiah preached the word of God
With little or no success.

Now, by writing the words down
There's the hope of the possibility of permanence.

Jeremiah dictates to Baruch the words of God
Baruch goes to the temple on a busy day
And reads the scroll through a window.

This time, some of the temple officials listened.

And they grow alarmed.

They go to the king's palace
To tell the king's secretaries what happened.

They responded by sending Jehudi
To bring Baruch and the scroll.

When Baruch arrives, they asked him to read the scroll.

They too become alarmed.

They tell Baruch to go find Jeremiah
And for both of them to go into hiding.

They take the scroll and go to the king's winter's chamber.

The king was warming himself by the fire.

With all the officials pressed in behind him
They tell Jehudi to go ahead and read the scroll.

Whenever Jehudi finished reading a column or two
The king, in blatant contempt
Stopped him and took his knife
And cut off a column or two
And threw it in the fire.

When Jehudi finished reading
The entire scroll was destroyed in the fire.

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We close out the chapter
Hearing God informing Jeremiah

To write again the words God
Words of condemnation
Not only to the people of Judah,

But words specifically condemning the king.

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God called Jeremiah to speak truth to power.

He did so for 40 years of ministry with little success.

Those in power tried to silence Jeremiah.

They sought to censor his words

And yet . . . the very same writings

The king burned in his fire

Stand before us today!

Writings that have survived for 2500 hundred years.

Those during Jeremiah's day showed

At the very least, indifference to them

And at the most, contempt

For what was written.

But countless others throughout the centuries

Have been deeply impacted by his words.

Today, Jeremiah's words have become a part of the canon

We call the Bible, the Holy Scriptures.

Its eternal message, initially given to Judah in 605 BCE

Continues to impact and transform readers today.

The king sought to destroy God's word
To censor and ban the words of truth
And yet, its message is eternal
Here it is before us this morning.

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It reminds me of a story I have shared with you before
But it's worth sharing again.

It was told to me by my friend, a Mennonite pastor
Rev. Hailu Cherenet
Who was imprisoned for his faith.

From 1987 to 1991,
Ethiopia was governed by a communist state.

The government banned religious services
Home Bible studies

Arrested ministers and pastors
Destroyed all their religious books
And even burn their personal Bibles.

The censored anything and everything
That came out of the church in Ethiopia.

The ministers and pastors saw it coming.

They knew they would be arrested and thrown in jail.

They knew their Bibles would be confiscated and destroyed.

And so, they decided to memorize vast portions of scripture.

And while they were in prison
They recited those memorized portions of scripture

For their own personal encouragement
And for their colleagues in faith in other prison cells.

Surprisingly, others who were not pastors but criminals
Heard the recited words

And many of them were convicted
And brought into a saving relationship
With the Lord Jesus Christ.

In just those few years, 1987 to 1991, the Mennonite Church
Grew from 8,000 to 80,000 members.

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In today's Scripture Lesson
No sooner had the king burned the scroll
Then another scroll was written.

God told Jeremiah to write all that was on the first scroll
And "many more words were added."

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William Tyndale was a leader
In the Protestant movement in England

In 1534, Tyndale published an English translation
Of the Bible's New Testament.

The Archbishop Wolsey, in outrage
Began to burn copies of it
At St. Paul's Cathedral in London.

To make a point, he wanted the fire to be high and mighty
And he wanted a constant supply of fuel.

So he told the Bishop of London
To go and buy as many Bibles as he could find.

He went to Antwerp
And found a merchant named Packington

He asked Packington if he knew where he could buy Bibles.

Packington told him
He could find him as many as he wanted.

Packington knew Tyndale.

Immediately he went to Tyndale and said, "I know you are a poor man with a pile of New Testaments that you have spent everything you have to print. But I have finally found a buyer."

When Tyndale asked who it was, Packington told him it was the bishop of London. "Oh," said Tyndale, "that's because he will burn them."

"[And that makes me very happy]," Tyndale said, "because I will gain these three benefits: I will get money from the bishop to bring me out of debt; the whole world will cry out against the burning of God's Word; and the surplus will enable me to correct the New Testament and publish a new edition that you will like even better than the first."

For his actions, in 1536, Tyndale was burned at the stake

The word of God cannot be suppressed.

It will not be censored.

God's call to justice and peace
Will always find its way to light.

The way, the truth and the life
Of Jesus Christ will find a way
To inform and transform people.

Whether it be by the written or spoken word
Or by the faithful example of believers

God's Word is eternal!

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1 Peter 1:24-25b NLT

**²⁴ As the Scriptures say,
“People are like grass;
their beauty is like a flower in the field.
The grass withers and the flower fades.**

²⁵ But the word of the Lord remains forever.”