Jeremiah 26:8-15 (15b) for in truth the Lord sent me to you to speak all these words in your hearing.

Over the past week I have seen and read a number of articles that have spoken of the horror of what is called “success theology.” Success theology developed gradually from the 50’s and 60’s as Psychology began to become a more accepted norm for society. Eventually it just took one pastor to begin touting these ideas as “religion.” What happened is that eventually the church, many churches, picked up on this idea and I would have to say that it is very much a “norm” for many in today’s Christian world.

Success theology goes something like this. If you think positive, if you dream big, if you show the Lord your heart then the Lord is going to bless you with awesome gifts. Have faith, have the Lord and because the Lord loves you and wants only the best for you, why the Lord of his power will see to it that your life is great and wonderful and all will be well. If you just think about what I have said here, I think you can probably identify any number of things that you have seen and heard and then realize that such things are a part and parcel of “success theology.” Only there is a slight problem!

“Success theology” is a false theology. One of the articles I read was by a woman who was a writer and she had just written a book on “success theology.” She researched and measured, observed and believed in this thing. Her book was positive and upbeat and for the most part lauded the wonders of what this theology promises. And then shortly after her book was printed, she was diagnosed with cancer! As she wrote the article of her struggle, she makes it clear she doesn’t have much time left, yep, she is going to die. What she was really wrestling with is how she, a big fan and practitioner of this belief, ended up with cancer. She was positive and upbeat. She believes she deserves a lot better than this. And now because of this cancer she is concluding that maybe there is something wrong with this theology. Because now she is being told by those she thought her friends and fellow Christians that all of this was happening because she did not have the right faith, a strong enough faith, yeah, she was not really a believer!

And in a way I believe that is somewhat true. Because as you read this woman’s article it is clear she doesn’t grasp the truth of sin and its horror. It is clear she didn’t know that Jesus came to be her Savior from sin and to grant her the gift of eternal life and salvation. For that matter her article never even mentions Jesus! It is clear that she doesn’t understand what is going on and why this is happening because, evidently, somewhere along the line she wasn’t lead to God’s Word and truth for her faith, but rather to man’s word and ideas for her faith. And to her at first this theology seemed right because everyone was in on it.

Don’t get me wrong, these promoters of this false theology have all sorts of passages they use to “show” this. They use the passages wrong. They ignore context and purpose of the passage. For instance, one of the articles that I shared was on a common passage often misused, **“I can do everything through him who gives me strength.** (Php 4:13). Successors use this passage to tell you that God will bless whatever you want to achieve, that God will give you whatever strength needed to achieve everything you want. Except that is pretty much the opposite of what the passage is saying. The passage is actually talking about how God will give you strength to be content in any and every situation. To be hungry, well fed, having plenty or having nothing, whatever is going on, God will give you the strength to remain in the faith and to remain strong in His promises, even if you have cancer.

Fact is, I don’t know of any passages where God tells us that as Christians we won’t experience any problems or have any troubles. I find lots of passages that do tell us we will need to help each other, support each other and strive through many difficulties because we are God’s children. If you want to see this particular truth in action, well then, let’s just turn our attention to Jeremiah and his life. Here is a study in what a child of God can expect from this world. Our theme will be: JEREMIAH: SHADOW OF CHRIST.

I think just from my theme you can grasp that I believe that Jeremiah’s life was surely a shadow of what our Lord and Savior will be and endure. That’s what is meant by the term “shadow”, that there is a similarity between an event or life and the Lord’s Messiah. Well that is certainly true in Jeremiah’s life.

To begin, I should tell you that Jeremiah started his life of prophecy, that is, his life of serving the Lord under the leadership of Godly King Josiah. For 17 years Jeremiah was lauded and applauded, recognized absolutely as a prophet of the Lord God. Josiah heard and worked at following the Lord, but I am afraid that even good king Josiah was at times fooled by the false prophets that surrounded him. Josiah was killed in battle and with Josiah’s death, Jeremiah’s life would take a radical turn.

From now on, Jeremiah’s life is going to be one of hardship and opposition from the very people who once respected and honored him. Our text is one instance of what Jeremiah faced, actually I think I would label it the beginning of the difficulties he would face. God had sent Jeremiah to speak his word. Note that Jeremiah is careful, as the Lord told him, to speak everything the Lord wanted him to say. It is true that Jeremiah’s words were harsh and they were words of judgment against God’s people but nevertheless, Jeremiah spoke them just as he was supposed to. He spoke God’s truth and did not waver in any detail from what God had commanded him to say.

Please note Jesus was the same way. Jesus came to speak exactly what God the Father directed Him to say. Jesus made it clear that what His Father spoke, that’s what He spoke. In John 7:16 Jesus says plainly, **“My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me.”** While it is true that Jesus came to fulfill the Law in order to bring salvation and eternal life to the world, a message vastly different from Jeremiah, still both of these prophets of God spoke God’s truth exactly as God wished.

Please note that the reaction of the people to Jeremiah was pretty stark. Their reaction was, **“You must die!”** They surrounded him and got in his face as they shouted this. And that was the religious people and the priests who did this. Yet, Jeremiah had only told the truth. Jeremiah actually had spoken words in full agreement with many of God’s other prophets. What is more, please note that at the time of Jeremiah, Israel, the Northern Kingdom is gone! God had foretold her destruction and so it was. Now here was God, through his prophet Jeremiah (and others) giving Judah the same warnings, the same pronouncement of judgment because of persistent sin (really unbelief!) and the people simply refuse to hear. And so it is that Jeremiah’s life becomes one of persecution, hardship and eventually death at the hands of these people. (Please note that in this particular instant, Jeremiah is not going to die yet. He will have another 47 years of hardship and persecution before finally the Lord allows him home and tradition has it that it was through stoning to death.

It is obvious that Jesus faced the same opposition from the world, yes, from those supposedly God’s people. After an initial year of popularity, the religious leadership of the Jews began to oppose and work against Jesus in every way they could. Eventually, they managed to get Jesus killed, and perhaps would have killed Jesus a few times earlier had it not been for the miraculous powers of Jesus. Jesus, our Savior, faced the opposition of the world.

That shouldn’t surprise us. Today we still live in a world opposed to God’s Word and truth. It is one way to identify those who are enemies of God and his Son Jesus. Our catechism simply reminds us of this truth when it tells us under the First Petition of the Lord’s Prayer: *“But whoever teaches and lives contrary to God’s Word dishonors God’s name among us.”* Our Catechism also warns us that if we persistently refuse to hear, believe and live God’s Word in our lives that is despising God and his Word. The people of Jeremiah’s day and Jesus’ day had that problem. Many today also persistently despise God and his Word. Jesus himself warns: **“If the world hates you, keep in mind it hated me first.”** And again, **“I have given them your word and the world has hated them for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world.”** We have got to understand that the world is not our friend and we have got to understand the fine line of being in the world but not being of the world!

Just a few other thoughts with Jeremiah. Notice Jeremiah’s attitude when it came down to this trouble. He says, **“The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the things you have heard…As for me, I am in your hands: do with me whatever you think is good and right…”** You have to admire the moxy of this man. He knows he is from the Lord and he is doing the work of the Lord and it is clear that he is unconcerned with what the people should decide to do. It is clear that Jeremiah simply and absolutely trusts in God. Whatever happens, Jeremiah knows that God is with him and will eternally take care of him.

Yep, so with Jesus. Jesus simply trusted His Father. Think of him in Gethsemane with the full weight and agony of what was coming on his soul and still Jesus prays: **“Not as I will, but as you will.”** Jesus made it clear that he had come to do the Father’s will, yes, to even die on the cross to pay for our sins. That’s just what he did. He did that in the full understanding that he would rise from the dead, that death could not keep its hold on him. We hear that trust in the final words of Jesus on the cross, **“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”** Both men are the absolute example of trust in the Lord!

And both men completed their mission. Jeremiah’s mission was to be the voice of God so that when Jerusalem was destroyed and captivity ensued the people knew without a doubt that it was because of their sin and refusal to believe God. Jesus’ mission was also completed. That he should die on the cross to pay for our sin and then rise again so that we might truly know that eternal life and salvation are won in Him. Our sins are paid for. Our failures and shortcomings under the Law are washed away and no longer counted against us, just because of what Jesus has done. In Jesus, God promises to be with us, to watch over us, to uphold and strengthen us to endure whatever this sinful and godless world can throw our way. We know this is true in Jesus. Think of the Apostles. All but one died a martyr for the name of Jesus. Think of Paul and his thorn in the flesh, a problem God told him was going to be because Paul was made stronger in faith through his physical difficulties. Jesus doesn’t promise us heaven on earth, he promises us perfection and eternal joy in heaven and He promises that in Him and through Him alone we will get there. His mission is complete. Our salvation is sure.

Don’t think that when you are a Christian, all life is going to be great and wonderful. Know rather, that as a child of God things might get tough, life might just be filled with trouble. But know that God is with you. He will guard and keep you in the faith. He will keep you in his Word and truth. God will always lead you to Jesus, and there, you will see the eternal life Jesus has won and the gift of heaven that will be yours. God help us to be like Jeremiah, a shadow of Jesus, an example of faith no matter what! Amen.